Creating an uncompromised place to belong: Why do I find myself in networks?

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Contents

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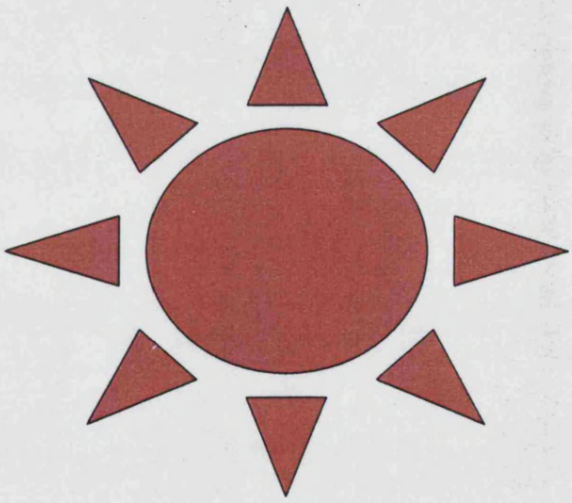
And many thanks to Jack Whitehead, my supervisor, who never once doubted that I would find myself here.

This one's for us.



Creating an uncompromised place to belong: why do I find myself in networks?

Abstract of PhD Submission
Madeline Church

My inquiry sits within the reflective paradigm. I start from an understanding that knowing myself better will enhance my capacity for good action in the world. Through questioning myself and writing myself on to the page, I trace how I resist community formations, while simultaneously wanting to be in community with others. This paradox has its roots in my multiple experiences of being bullied, and finds transformation in my stubborn refusal to retreat into disconnection.

I notice the way bullying is part of my fabric. I trace my resistance to these experiences in my embodied experience of connecting to others, through a form of shape-changing. I see how question-forming is both an expression of my own bullying tendencies, and an intention to overcome them. Through my connection to others and my curiosity, I form a networked community in which I can work in the world as a network coordinator, action-researcher, activist and evaluator.

I show how my approach to this work is rooted in the values of compassion, love, and fairness, and inspired by art. I hold myself to account in relation to these values, as living standards by which I judge myself and my action in the world. This finds expression in research that helps us to design more appropriate criteria for the evaluation of international social change networks. Through this process I inquire with others into the nature of networks, and their potential for supporting us in lightly-held communities which liberate us to be dynamic, diverse and creative individuals working together for common purpose. I tentatively conclude that networks have the potential to increase my and our capacity for love.

Through this research I am developing new ways of knowing about what we are doing as reflective practitioners, and by what standards we can invite others to judge our work. I am, through my practice, making space for us to flourish, as individuals and communities. In this way I use the energy released by my response to bullying in the service of transformation.

Introductory framing

Humberto Maturana, the Chilean biologist and systems thinker, opened a recent seminar day with these words:

'I am going to weave for you a history of my thinking'. (A day with Humberto Maturana, 6 September 2004, St Anne's College, Oxford)

For the next four hours he held me in an enchanted place, stringing a story of his many thinking years on a few seminal, perception-shifting moments. I was inspired by this great man. He caught my imagination, and he encouraged me to breathe in, to 'inspire'. He started with a story about his mother, as I shall, with mine.

At around the time when I was being bullied at school I remember my mother saying (I cannot remember where or why), "the most important thing in life is to find balance." I have always thought of my mother as embodying a kind of unspoken wisdom, and it is Maturana's history of his thinking that brings my memory of this moment to my mind. This is ironic, for as my mother has got older and developed Parkinson's disease, her physical balance has become cruelly unpredictable. What I have made of her meaning of **balance** will be revealed in these pages.

This doctorate is the product of five years of intensive reflection, conducted while working. This written document combines two areas of inquiry. One, an internal focus, what Marshall (1995, 2001, 2004) refers to as 'self-reflective inquiry' or Whitehead (2004) calls 'self-study', what can be thought of, as Winter *et al.* (1999) do, as living within the reflective practitioner paradigm initiated by Schon (1991). This involves a series of reflections on simple questions such as Who am I? What am I doing? How do I do these things? What do I know?, or a combined global question, 'What is going on here?'. Second, a work focus, a process of collaborative action research with international social change networks, looking at what criteria might be most appropriate for evaluating them and the work we do in and through them. The combined force of these two sets of questions leads me to ask myself, 'Why do I find myself in networks?'

Through a process of writing, asking myself 'what is going on here?' and writing again, I have developed a process of calling myself to account, using the standards of love, compassion, fairness and art as those most important to me to be judged by. These 'living standards' (Whitehead, 2003) are, I believe, a potential contribution to the call for establishing appropriate criteria for judging such self-study, reflective practice accounts. I start from an understanding that it is through unfolding knowing of myself that I become a knowledgeable practitioner (Kusher, 2000), thus confirming Bullough & Pinnegar's (2004) hunch that it is essential to consider the ontological when creating such living standards.

> *'The consideration of ontology, of one's being in and toward the world, should be a central feature of any discussion of the value of self-study research' (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004 p. 319)*

In addition, the form of the text, employing my aesthetic imagination (Winter *et al.*, 1999), is a contribution to finding new forms of presentation (Marshall, 1992) and to fostering

what Winter *et al.* call a much-needed 'aesthetic competence' in order for us to understand more fully how we are living and acting in the world as reflective professionals, regardless of our work.

These two aspects of the work, one internally oriented, the other outwardly oriented, find connection with each other through a core lived experience, **bullying**, and my responses to that experience: **forming networks of connection and relation.**

The complex response I make to my **repeated experience of being bullied** is almost certainly the 'lived experience' (van Manen 1997, 2002) which has held my attention for these five years and on backwards to my childhood. Determined reflection on this experience has led me to a greater depth of understanding of how I am marked by it, how I **embody** it and how I have committed my energy in living in this world to **transform** it. I have also come to know **my own capacity for bullying** and the hard work I must put in to recognise this, hold it, reflect on it and transform it.

The themes that run through as I seek to make sense, and explain significance, have a dual set of properties. They are both internal, leading to the **inner me**, while at the same time being externally-oriented, leading to the **nature of connection with others**. They are **all threaded together**, they weave in and out of one another.

The Fabric of the Research

The immediate experience of being bullied is identified as part of the fabric, the tissue of my being.

It throws up the **embodied** nature of my response, the internal felt experience, while at the same time a sense that my capacity for a subtle **embodied connection** to the other may have played some role in threatening the comfort of that other, such that they felt moved to threaten me.

My examination of this embodied response and connection is one that through the process of inquiry I have come to see as a capacity for **shape-changing.** By this I mean two things: an ability to stretch myself to live in many different worlds of experience, to communicate with government-level policy-makers and poor rural farm labourers, with artists, development workers, evaluators, prisoners, co-researchers; and a subtle unconscious ability to **live with porous boundaries** (Rayner, 1997), of never quite holding a static identity, of being able to connect to others by a strange channel of engagement which I find extremely challenging to explain.

At a more conscious level, I have begun to appreciate that my long-acknowledged resistance to working in organisations, to joining groups or political parties finds its roots in the very nature of that experience. My incessant capacity for **asking 'difficult' questions**, even as a young child, set me apart. My resistance to the norms of group behaviour almost certainly found no favour with those seeking to impose group order in the playground. The attempt to force me to conform generated a form of shape-changing, a kind of survival strategy, and a dogged-ness in **resisting the repressive nature of conformity**, the lazy ease of **community**. I have found myself in a constant struggle to string together **networks** of relations outside standard community formations. My educational and professional trajectory seems perversely difficult on the surface. I started working as an actress when 15, and juggled performing in the theatre and filming

for T.V. with studying and revising for 'O' and 'A' levels, being a part neither of the 'adult' world of the theatre, nor the 'child' world of school. I went to university when I was 29, too old to be a 'normal' student, too young to be 'a respectable aunt' mature student. I took myself alone to El Salvador once I graduated, and decided to live in the most remote, undeveloped and difficult community I could find, one struggling to even think of itself as community. Back in England I worked briefly for an organisation, and found myself **again being bullied** for my strangeness, my reluctance to adhere to unquestioned norms, my determination to **question**.

My capacity for **forming and asking questions** has been transformed during the process of this research, as I have come to understand how my young curiosity became disfigured and distorted. **Questioning others**, and **resisting their questions** in return, became a way of not being seen, of **controlling the dangers of connection**. My capacity for bullying found expression through a kind of interrogational questioning of others. Yet at all times I have been aware that my question-forming is linked to the shape-changing quality. It is as if the question emerges for me from the subtle connections with my environment. It arises (Collingwood, 1939) or makes itself known from the implicate order (Bohm, 1987). This question-making has itself changed shape throughout this inquiry process, as my work has largely become the art of asking the kinds of questions that reveal and open up that which I and others are interested in knowing about. This work arises in **facilitation, evaluation, and inquiry**.

In 1995 I began to work as a group **facilitator** for the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP). In 1997 I became the first coordinator of a small network of UK aid agencies working in Colombia, the ABColombia Group. These working experiences are outward expressions of my desire to seek a working environment that would balance **freedom and connection**. I have found myself able to be **simultaneously a participant and an outside eye** in my work as a facilitator. This allows me to be **a part of** a group while retaining my **apartness**. It allows me to be **connected and disconnected** at one and the same time. It is this I mean when I speak of **balance**.

My work as a **network coordinator** places me in a position which allows me to work at the edges of organisations, to know some of the inside of organisational life, yet to construct linkages and networks of relation that cross in and out of organisations and that are the product of **trust, shared values, and negotiated joint action**. This feels like a new way of doing business, and provides enough space and structure for the **individual and the 'community'** to mutually reinforce one another.

In 1996 I participated in a **participatory evaluation** process of AVP. We were determined that our work as volunteers should be judged on criteria that we thought reflected the values of the project, the process it offered, and the hope we were seeking to generate. I knew how much I detested the notion that we only learn lessons by examining mistakes (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2001), and resisted the inspection culture tied to aims, objectives, outcomes and goals. I felt in my bones that this **disguised bullying** of professionals was not something I wanted to be part of. I became conscious through my network work that international networks would be exposed to this process, as most of them are grant-funded by donors who expect some form of 'accounting for' procedure. I wanted to see if we could, as network practitioners, come together to **define some criteria of our own**. This work had its own discrete life, informed by a variety of network and development thinkers (Castells, 2000; Karl, 1999; Chambers, 1997; Starkey, 1997), the practice of many network coordinators (Kathleen

Armstrong, Helen Gould, Priyanthi Fernando, Sally Joss), and the pragmatic evaluation mind of Mark Bitel (Partners in Evaluation). It has not only generated a 'product', in the form of a research report for those working with networks (Church *et al.*, 2003), it has also contributed to a burgeoning series of **networks of connection across the world** with those also trying to perceive more deeply what working in networks can bring.

At a more critical level, I have begun, in my practice of being a **freelance evaluator**, to craft a way of holding on to the **diversity of experience and perspective** that a project necessarily embodies (Kushner, 2000). At the same time I continue to ask how we can renew our professional practice by challenging the technologising and administrative frameworks of 'aims, objectives, targets and strategies', and reintroduce values of hope, compassion and even love into the work we do in the world (van Manen, 1997; Kushner, 2000). I have begun to see how I can **ask transforming and illuminating questions** in the service of our **knowledge and inspiration**, leading to a new language for our work (Shaw, 2002).

Throughout I have written. **Writing** is the most **profound reflective process** for me. It is an exercise in thinking, creating, reflecting, emerging, engaging with depth, playing with words, and through this process **I create**, in some senses, **my self** (van Manen, 1997, 2002). It is another form of embodiment, of meeting my self in my words. I write in response to others words, to their art (Gormley, 2000; Bourgeois, 2003), to their ideas and to their created selves. **I write to clear my mind, so that another mind can arise.** This research is in large part generated through the process of writing and rewriting, reading, conversing, writing and rewriting. It is here that I exercise my aesthetic imagination (Winter *et al.*, 1999).

Conversational partners

Over five years I feel I have danced with some deeply influential conversational partners. We have whirled about in my writing world, and each seems to have led on to another, a kind of 'may I have this dance?' hand-off that has opened my mind to ways of thinking, reflecting, tripping over myself, tripping over them, finding rhythm, and a kind of grace. They have helped me to lay this story open to the gaze of the reader without too many of my well-learned tricks of deception and disguise, but with the **aesthetic sense of an artist** who seeks to make available the mystery of lived experience through an act of transformation (van Manen, 1997; Winter *et al,* 1999).

My investigation of **embodiment** and **subtle connection** has been enriched by repeated reading and questioning and writing sparked by David Bohm's (1987) understanding of 'implicate order' and Antony Gormley's (2000) use of his body in his search for connected experience in art. More recently I have been inspired by ideas formulated by Alan Rayner (1997, 2004) which question the nature of space, object, and **boundaries**, and Maturana & Varela's (1998) ideas about a biology of love. My regular yoga practice, and the writing of Heinz Grill (1996), have helped illuminate how the traces of bullying remain embodied within me, and have helped me to pay attention to my quest for connection and my resistance to it in a mindful, rather than thoughtful, way, through the **breath**.

In my practice as an **evaluator** I have been inspired by the encouragement of Saville Kushner's (2000) writing, as he urges us to read the nature of a project or programme through the eyes and experience of those who are touched by it. At a more philosophical

level, both Kushner and van Manen (1997) provide a sounding board for my critique of the way the military and administrative language of planning has infected our approach to making a difference in the world. In seeking to bring this to attention with those I work with, I am given courage by Patricia Shaw's (2002) practice of 'changing the conversation' in institutional settings, by listening, reflecting and asking questions of those in the thick of work.

In taking on the coordination and leadership of the action research project on International Networks and Evaluation, I found Manuel Castells (1996, 1997, 2000) to be a helpful framing reference point. I sought to broaden our understanding by reading widely across network literature, and relevant development thinkers, most notably Robert Chambers (1997), whose commitment to democracy, decentralisation, dynamism and diversity gave me a grounding sense of values within which our thinking fitted nicely. Since publication of the report, and my continuing work on network evaluation and in exchanging ideas with others in the field, I have benefited from the complexities of Fritjof Capra's (1996, 2003) work to enhance my intellectual understanding.

Woven in and around this has been the committed practice of writing and rewriting, a way of being in the world that has allowed me to see development of ideas over time, and to create, through writing, a text that entices and illuminates, explains and guides. I was inspired early in this process by Eric Booth (1997) and his examination of the artistry available in the everyday, by Winter *et al.'s* (1999) encouragement to explore through fictionalising, by Judi Marshall's (2001) attention to writing as inner process, and by van Manen's (1997, 2002) deep account of the power of writing as research. I keep in mind the poetics that haunt Anne Michaels' novel Fugitive Pieces, and her ability to transform the holocaust into true beauty.

Testing out the text has been a penultimate stage in the drive to 'finish' the text. I am privileged to have had energetic and energising conversations about how my sense-making translates into meaning for others, with Eleanor Lohr, Kimmett Edgar, and Sheila Blankfield. These are people who know me well, and have offered their time and considerable thoughtfulness to give me high-quality attention. Conversations with them, as with other writers, are offered as evidence of the **connected nature of my inquiry, and my inquiry into connection.**

Methodology

The way I have approached this research is as a creative, reflexive person, working with an eclectic approach to meaning-making. I proceed from a loosely held understanding that I must keep inquiring and keep noticing, if I am to understand and be able to explain to others. This means a kind of internal-external question-forming, in which I hold the subject matter close, and place it at a distance. This distancing-closeness happens through keeping myself in mind, as well as my inquiry. As such I keep an integrated sense of self-reflective research and collaborative research with others.

I follow the kind of 'improvisatory self-realisation' that Winter (1997) describes, drawing in a body of prior professional knowledge, and personal experience, as I make my way through my inquiry. I notice how my thinking 'is derived from our bodies of knowledge and values, and from the personal and cultural experiences which underlie them.' (Winter *et al.,* 1999, p.110)

Inquiry questions to myself are met with responses from my working environment, and my networks of connection, just as inquiry questions in our networks action research group are met with internal responses from me which illuminate my individual way of knowing. Engagement with the wider world through written text in the form of Working Paper 121 (Church *et al.*, 2003) shows how my influence extends and how such connection influences me. This I explain to you through a series of metaphors – nets, knots, threads, spaghetti, hyphens – which not only have explanatory power, but have a presence throughout the fabric of the research. These metaphors have life in that they not only reveal meaning, but have **emerged** as the way the research has knotted itself together. They are influenced by the webs of life and interconnection written about by Capra (1996), Castells (1996), Rayner (1997, 2004), and Shaw (2002), but have emerged as the research has progressed rather than been a methodology chosen up front.

This equates to the kind of messy human process of knowledge creation so clearly articulated by Senge & Scharmer (2001). I take heart from Marshall's (1995) conviction that researchers indeed *make* knowledge.

The simple questions that are there in the first paragraph, brought together under the 'what is going on here?' question, help me to keep track of my intention to reveal the inner workings of my life and practice, and to explain what I think I have learnt. I have been asking more detailed questions of myself and my colleagues as the work has progressed, such as:

Questions for **me**

How do I use **questions** in my life and work?
How do I infuse my work with **love** and **compassion**?
How does being **a part** and **apart** give me strength?
How do I stay **individual** in the **community**?
Why do I **find myself** in **networks**?

Question for **us**

How can we design criteria for evaluation which value growth and individuals and human complexity, which reveal subtlety and context, and which **inspire** us to greater things?

This is a process of understanding, and a process which always produces further inquiry. It could be likened to the hermeneutic phenomenological stance described by van Manen (1997). His six research activities help in providing a kind of anchoring to my thinking, as I seek to make sense. Not so much a methodological framework, more a network of support, something that allows me to jump.

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole

(pp. 30-31)

This is a story of evolution and definition. The last five years of working in this way, paying attention to recurring themes and ideas, tracing their connections to the life I lead and the work I do, has allowed me to see the evolution of my life. This is not a journey; it is a process of **emerging forms**, of what I call myself and the extent and limits of my work. It is like seeing a shape under water, something solid yet not clearly defined, something that is affected by the turbulence or relative calm of its environment, the angle of the light, where you sit in relation to it, perspective. Every telling of the story brings greater definition, yet where I start in the story changes the angle, the quality of perception, the depth, and the variety of connections that I make. They evolve, the shape changes, yet in each attempt to present a picture, there is greater definition. This does not necessarily make for greater clarity, but it produces more solid form, substance, even if this form is maybe more abstract, less accessible to words.

Writing as sense-making

Such sense-making is challenging to present. Knowing how to hold a story, not the story, together in order to guide the reader, with a strong enough torch, through an **evolving set of connections**, demands that I produce what Denzin (1997) would call a reflexive messy text, which threads my writerly and poetic self through pages that seek to illuminate my work. My research has been about that just as much as about substantive content. Finding a way to engage, and explain, how I come to know the things I talk about, involves allowing not just my intellectual self, but also my artistic, embodied and aesthetic self to emerge through these pages. The invitation to you is to participate in the experience of my sense-making, not just the results. This is crucial, as the results are only there because of the process, and indeed many of the results are process. This seems obvious, otherwise why would be interested in the methodological. Yet it is the most difficult to do justice to, as it is complex, and tends to defy normal 'accounting for' procedures. It is highly individual, and value-driven, and yet it is not static, formalised, or even very well understood by me, even now.

The writing process has itself been central to sense-making throughout these five years, especially the way writing myself in the third person, through anecdotes, tales, stories, and scripts, has allowed me to be simultaneously in and out of my internal inquiry, creating a kind of third eye between myself and my writing my self. Writing in response to others' artistic work, led by tentative threads and hyphens of connection, has led to enriched understanding of my influence and my receptivity to influence.

This text is intended as far as is possible to reflect the aspects I have outlined above, not just in its explanation, but in its aesthetic design. I have spent many hours working at working out how to tell you the reader about my research. The very process of working at this has been part of the research, and through it I have developed an understanding of my ways of being, the way I make sense of my life and my work, and my being-practice-making sense have evolved in the doing of it. I have sought to present my research to you in a way that reflects the evolution of it, as much as what I have come to know. This presentation incorporates creative writing, scholarly engagement with others, research reports, personal reflections, polemic, and responses to artistic endeavour by others, because these are the ways in which I understand myself and the context I am in, and how my learning happens.

Throughout the sections I highlight **in bold the threads of the story** I am telling, with the intention of drawing your attention to the meaning I am making, without needing always to 'explain', and by explaining explode what Marshall (1992), Kushner (2000) and van Manen (2002) in various guises refer to as the mystery, or mood of the research. This mood is complemented by hyphenated links into others' writing, my creative writing, poetry, and images, to create a richer, denser and more aesthetic experience. It is an organic process, one which is fragile, revealing, slow, exciting and very challenging to present. Winter *et al.* get near to a tight description of this process when they talk of:

> *'the development of understanding by means of an analytical process grounded in an 'aesthetic' shaping of experience; empathy, sensitivity and ironic self-awareness achieved through the imagination and embodied in fictions.' (Winter et al., 1999, pp. 194-5)*

Standards of judgement

As a way of living out my questions, I invite you to use the following standards as a reference point for judging the quality of this work.

First standard of judgement: I invite you to judge me on my ability to demonstrate that it is possible to hold the anger and pain generated by repeated bullying both in the tongue of an activist, a professional agitator, a defender of rights, and in the soft arms of an evaluator, net-worker, and facilitator. This means finding **a balance** between righteous anger against unfairness, and loving compassion, without losing the capacity for either.

Second standard of judgement: I invite you to judge me on my efforts to stay connected to individual energy, difference, and uniqueness, while striving to make communities that hold those individuals together lightly. This means **finding balance** between the cohesion of community and the imagination and individuality of the self, without one squashing or corrupting the other.

Third standard of judgement: I invite you to judge me on my ability to reveal and bring to life a whole version of **'who I am, what I do, and why I do it'**, using my full creative powers, through a text will inspire you, the reader, to see the unique and myriad ways individuals forge their lives. This means finding and using inspiration, the in-breath of life and connection to others, to fire my imagination and inspire you in return.

Brief introduction to sections

Firstly, there is what I call the **Back Story.** This is a term often used in **writing a script**, a form I am comfortable with through formative years in the theatre and TV, and which I employ here as a structural device. The Back Story is the stuff that the writer needs to know about character motivation, which then emerges in dramatic, episodic and subtle ways, through images, words, and physical action, through the story that is then told. The reader is supposed to pick this up, in fact there is a rule that you don't provide such exposition in a script, but here it is crucial that you know in order to find your way around.

Next comes some explanation about **the way I am and the way I make sense**, leading us into the complexity of knots, nets and threads and exposing the interwoven, messy, unresolved journey of greater knowing, and not knowing enough. This is my **triangle of**

ontology, methodology and epistemology. It shows you what I know about my capacity for forming questions, and my embodied responses to my contextual field, aspects that are essential for understanding how I act to channel my anger into forging stronger relationships and greater expansiveness.

Next up, I trace the **threads that knot together my work** as an activist, a net-worker and an evaluator. In Episode One, Part One, I recreate the experience of doing the Action Research Project, and show the way in which we worked together, in order to illuminate the meaning of **working together** in networks. It highlights not just the research 'output' but also the messy human business of doing the work. In Part Two, I sit down with Fritjof Capra (1996), and further my understanding of the power networks could and do have to create change. In Part Three I trace the influence the work has had to date, showing its capacity for unpredictable influence. You will see how I have come to understand that if I allow myself to be the subject of others questions, the connection this generates releases a creative energy which can **inspire me and others** further.

In Episode Two I interview myself about my work as an evaluator, evaluating myself and my work against a set of standards that reflect my values. This demands some reflection on what the **recurring question or questions** are for me at the moment, as I reach the end of this piece of sense-making. Central to this is an inquiry into various aspects of **accountability**. As I have come to understand the necessary inevitability, as the old exile in Gurnah's novel *By the Sea* does, of **accounting for myself** to others, I have begun to ask myself and others about to what, or to whom, we want to be held accountable. This has come about as I have gained confidence in my practice as a question-maker, and reached a greater level of understanding about how I interact with and influence the normal practice of conversation around working in and evaluating networks. Central to this concern is a questioning of the language that we use in this conversation about evaluation, and an intention to renew our work around **love**.

Throughout, there are **writing interludes**, in which I am writing about the act of writing, seeking to illuminate how **the act of writing is knowledge in the making**. You will see how the process of writing is both a creative and reflexive act, one which leads to real transformation of my understanding, and my ability to represent that understanding.

Finally, in what I would in an earlier life have called a conclusion, I ask the question, what have I learned, and what use might that be to you?, with the intention of identifying where what I have learned through this process is likely to lead us. This involves a reflection that network ways of organising have the potential to increase our capacity for love.

I hold myself to account through these pages, in relation to my own standards of art, love, justice and compassion. I work through a process of understanding what those embodied values are, and in the process I transform them from values which I live by, ontological values which inform my action and being in the world, into living standards of judgement (Whitehead, 2003; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004). They thus become epistemological standards, in that they can be accessed as criteria against which a way of knowing can be judged.

THE BACK STORY

Madeline Church – A Secret History

Bullying

The persistent damp patch on the ceiling that will not lie quietly under a new thickness of paint, this trace, this stain, repeats on me, evolving, spiralling, carrying me in its tight-jawed grasp.

"One important thought is that 'bullying' is not just a topic in the social world but is part of the structure of my being. As regards 'bullying' I am not just an observer or an analyst, but a victim and perpetrator. Bullying is part of my emotional inheritance, my political destiny, and my spiritual challenge.

Richard Winter SmallStories/Little Tales/Educational Research.

'Fear and self-pity both inhibit our compassion; so the violence of those who have come to see themselves as weak and threatened has an especially merciless character.' (Shaw, 1987, p. 126)

Madeleine...Madeleine et Suzanne...Madeleine et Suzanne sortient du cinema avec trois amies...

Once a week a French class, a language she has been learning since she was seven. Good at it too, she was, in her primary school environment, enjoyable, a new world.

She is now 11 and out of place, fearful and adrift. Madeline, the youngest Madeline in the family, known as 'little Madeline'. Little Madeline in a big new school. Her name like her aunt's and Grannie's, Madelines spelt the English way.

The girl: the one on top, the powerhouse of young excitement, the judo champ, the exciter, the mover, the challenger. She is too much. Far too much. She needs to be shortened, contained. Undone and remade. A girl in full. Too confident. Too out-there. A girl who thinks she can be, can have, can excite and confuse. She's an upside-down force,

pretending yet being, a woman in a girl, a girl in a boy, a stranger in a friend. She's 11 but 30, she's scary. Not how a girl should be.

The boy: He's afraid, toughing out his fear in the playground of the big boys. He's a broken boy, striving to hang on. A lout. A painful reminder that all is not well in this fearful world. He's small. He's skinny. He's a skin-head with big boots. He's a class below.

***She's** wearing white tights and talking posh in the playground, thinks everyone will love her. They always have. She's bold and brassy. **He's** afraid. **She's** afraid. **They** cannot see so they don't try. **She's** a target. **He's** desperate. Let's see what happens…*

What starts it? Something mundane, boringly familiar perhaps. And anyway with someone else, not him. She rejects the friendship of another boy, a boy in full, arrogant, beautiful, another bossy boots.

This boy turns.

This boy looks for help.

This boy uses the broken boy to play his sadistic game.

The broken boy responds.

Let's have some fun…

There's a misty, cold remembrance of what happens. It's a peculiarly effective way of torturing a young mind, a mind still seeking the place of joy.

A young mind whose name is all.

The French class is perfect. Madeleine et son amies Suzanne et Philippe live in the pages of a French text book. Going to cafes, the cinema, school, chatting inconsequentially about the ordinary care-free pursuits of young fictions. They're fun, they play, not too late or too loud. They're happy and friendly, they have mamon et papa, and holidays full of carefully-planned fun. The important words for a life of order are all there. The class read out loud. The class say Madeleine et Suzanne et Philippe allaient a l'ecole or au cinema. They enter and sortient. They jouent.

Dark forces enter the classroom. Madeline starts to falter and pitch. She changes shape, becomes the enemy. The sound of her name strangles

those who say it. Led by the broken boy they look across the room and see the strange little country fire-brand, the bossy little cow from the provinces, the white tights, the oddly intelligent one who won't shut up. They see her – her name is Madeline – and they despise. So they spit. They learn to spit her name, a spitting out of all they detest, all in her name. The name becomes gob, it hits the floor. Madeleine – gob – et Suzanne et Philippe sortient..They play. But now they are poisoned, their easy fantasy corroded with acid spit. They are no longer friends because Madeleine – gob – is a gob-inducer, she inspires hawking. The teacher fails to see the subtlety of the torture. Sees only scabby little kids, doesn't smell the bitter burning. Only she sees the fire in it. The fear she inspires, such a strange fear, a weird delighting fear, a mob-handed fear. Madeline. Such a lovely name, a family name, her aunt, her grannie, they loved their names and loved her. Inferences could be drawn. Magdalen is the root. 'Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never ...' Oh dear.

Madeline, Madeleine, Madeline, her spells turn to a stutter, her desire to survive surfaces like a wall of fire, desperate gagging desire to get out, run, disappear, hide, be safe. The noise of spitting is carved in her nose, the smell of the words pound into her puzzled brain. The fire carves a rivulet of steel through her mind, blacksmith hot, below ground. Belly feels funny, full of wobbling, wearing, welling fear. The sound of the spit is the sound of disgust, contempt, debasement and delight at the pain of others. Involuntarily she twitches and switches, hears the name, knows the gob will come. The French teacher, himself a towering bully, sees nothing or if he does imagines this to be the way of scabby London boys who'll never learn a word of the beautiful langue. Her tongue swells up with the gaseous feel of a gas mask over her nose. She remembers the tilt of the dentist's chair, the vision of a black rubber mask coming to suffocate her, the smell of gas rubber bloating her nostrils. She feels that gassy-rubber smell now, in her tongue, choking her, swelling. She says her name quietly, moodily, an incantation of recovery, retrieval. Madeleine, Madeleine, it is all she can say, she cannot get her tongue around the 'trois amies' and their trip 'au cinema', she believes she will never again have one amie, never play again, never thrill again to the skipping, running, loose-limbed fun of excitement. Just this, a painful and solitary fear in the gut, damp from the hatred seeping from the skins around her, their look of pity, disgust, fear that they'll be next. Her safety curtain of hair is impossibly fine, so easily lifted by the swirling November winds, her pain so soft to the touch, a wound under gossamer dressing.

Madeline – she walks like a small bundle of jelly, one foot heel to toe to the other, hoping this way she'll never reach there. In her first days she

ran all the way, her sister competing with who could walk the fastest. Now she's a trudger, she feels like a donkey dragging a plough, hoeing the earth, hoping for rain. Foot one follows foot two, she is counting, she loses count, she starts again. It is a long walk this way, a very long walk and she will miss the rush. ***She'll*** *be late, but safer. Maybe.* ***He'll*** *be in, won't he. Usually is, doesn't need to wait for her at the gate, will get plenty of opportunity later, plenty to feed his habit.* ***He*** *will humiliate her and gorge himself on her hurrying, desperate willingness to escape, her refusal to be bowed, to bow, to scrape the shit from his eyes.* ***She*** *sees his broken face peering out of his broken home and she knows he's chained links of steel forged hard and long.* ***He*** *knows, he'll show and he'll show it to her. Humiliation is whole for him.*

She *sees her route out of isolation – do the same and worse herself. She moulds herself into the image they have of her, a hateful, spiteful, vicious-tongued girl, licking her lips with the pleasure of giving it all back. Suddenly she is funny, awe-inspiring in her misdirected fury. She hears the tantrum in her and is powerless to prevent it. The tongue of gas licks fire.*

When I was 11, we moved to London. I was a new girl in a big London comprehensive come from a primary school just outside Stratford-on-Avon, hopelessly unfashionable and 'too bright for my own good'. A boy whose friendship I rejected decided to teach me a lesson. I underline that because it is a phrase often used by those intending to make others alter their behaviour through intimidation and violence. I certainly learned several 'lessons' during that time, but I don't believe that any one of them was the 'lesson' he wanted me to learn.

For six months I was treated like a pariah by my class. I was subject to the usual repetitive intimidating behaviour of following, tripping, threatening to get me after school....But the one that sticks with me is the way my name, Madeline, disgusted them. Our French books starred Suzanne and Philippe, and their friend, Madeleine. We had to read aloud in classes with Mr Liebrecht, himself a consummate bully. Any child who was forced to read a sentence with the name Madeleine in it would spit on the floor. I remember thinking impotently that it wasn't even spelt the same, mine only has two e-s. It was intensely painful and humiliating. It helped me to develop a keen sense of self-disgust.

Lessons learned
I learned that humiliating others seemed to generate respect
I learned that building walls around myself did nothing to put out the fire inside
I learned to be a different person because that confused them
I learned that most follow the crowd and that some do not, because they instinctively believe it's not fair

I remember very clearly thinking that I had to uproot myself, dig out the last remaining bits of me and dispense with them because they were not only hated by others but they had let me down, they had failed to cope with this new reality, they had left me stranded. I became impenetrable. I

constructed and tested elaborate ways of not being seen. Early attempts were crude - I grew my hair over my face – I then behaved as a mirror to those who were persecuting me and showed them their faces distorted in mine. I gained respect from my persecutors for my mercilessness, especially the way I lashed out at teachers and sought to undermine and destroy them. I started to smoke.

When I was 19, a young actress and doing a prestigious job which I had fought hard to get, a theatre director used me as his 'whipping boy'. He was renowned for picking on one person and deriving pleasure from humiliating them. Everyone else in the company watched, but did nothing. My confidence fell apart, so easily, and my sense of self-disgust returned.

Lessons reinforced I learned that humiliating others seemed to generate respect I learned that building walls around myself did nothing to put out the fire inside I learned that most follow the crowd

My last experience is of someone trying to bully me at work but not succeeding. I regularly tackled her about the way she treated me, although it had little lasting effect. I had made a conscious decision that I would tolerate some of her behaviour as I knew that she was on her way out. And I was prepared to work for her to get what I wanted. But I was shocked to learn later that everyone else in the organisation thought she was bullying me. And again, no-one did anything about it.

And I vowed that I would never stand around while someone disintegrated under my watchful eye; I would never grant someone the space to publicly humiliate another; I would never respect the culture of 'teaching someone a lesson'.

Madeline Church, 2000

Dyed in the wool - Bullying as fabric

This story, with all its threads, is essential for you to know. As Winter talks about bullying being part of the structure of his being, I use the word 'fabric'. My experiences of bullying, my responses to it, my capacity for it, are all dyed into the fabric of my being. This is not a story of recovery, nor a confession of guilt. This story is essential because of the way it has immanence, almost presence, in all that I do and am. It permeates the fluids, leaves traces on the tissue, and emerges like an erased pencil drawing, a tattoo under the skin. It is where the anger against injustice has not only roots, but definition.

I wrote the above in 2000, one of the earliest pieces of writing for this research that I did. It remains the starting point, whereas all other pieces have become less or more meaningful depending on my perspective. It is the starting point because it offers the first intimations of the elements present in this story of my research.

Let me weave the story for you again, in a way that brings to the foreground those elements.

Looking at this writing again and again, the half-glimpsed form of where my research will lead me is indeed there under the water.

In the first half, there is my **name**, **Madeline**, and its **links** to family, to **other languages**. This hints at my determination to maintain identity, at the same time as testing that identity out in connection with others through other forms of communication. My **embodied reaction** to the experience, the way my sense of self under attack is physically experienced, is a place I return to again and again in my efforts to understand and explain my embodied knowing. My ability to see myself as I was seen, as a bold, annoying, external force suggests the capacity I have for standing inside and outside. My choice to **change my shape**, become what I was being described as, take on another form, threads into my work as an actress, as a lobbyist, and as an evaluator. The anger and fear, the mute sense of injustice, and the urgent sense of connections breaking hooks into my activism and my **determination to create sustaining networks**.

The second half carries some clarity about what these experiences have meant and have led to. A determination **to stand up for fairness**, and a commitment **to stand alongside others**. There is an underlying **questioning**; a wanting to know why, which I know has been there all my life. There is too a resistance to the reinforcement of learning through the abuse of power, a deep knowledge that this is corrupting, and counter-productive. This brings form to my work in evaluation and the search for **learning through inspiration**.

The quotes, added last, tell you something about what has become my research agenda: repeating experiences, evolving definition, something always there, **immanent**. My own capacity for bullying behaviour, and a **route to compassion**, walking through self-pity and fear. The quote I use from Shaw, for instance, is one I wrote in my diary ten years ago and have found again. It is even more profound now. It's more than a point of reference. Not a grid reference because meeting it again doesn't take me back to the same place. A star maybe that changes its location in the sky. It is a **warning to myself** to note my own responses and seek to transform them.

. - madeline

Madeline - April 11 2002

Sometimes these days you frighten me a little;
The swift opinion and the tiger roar
Concealing who knows what involvement
With love and blood and death and maybe more.
- "who knows what"? - Not me, for sure.

But when I see the daftness of the dancing hare
Leaping and boxing under the April sky
With lolloping ears and slim-booted feet
Pounding the pavements to a salsa beat
I know that all is well in your bright care.

The big cat's coat gives bulk to the lightsome bone.
Roar on, Tiger!
And keep dancing, Hare!
Forty years is nowhere near enough
For someone on your mission with your flair.

Written by Madeline Blakeney, my aunt
For my fortieth birthday

Madeline

Hand and eyes and jaw and heart
Gesticulating realities, really gesticulating in multi lingual lines
Concentrated concentrating to mediate conversation
Bridled jaw and saddle set, she rides the pampas bare back.
Yet bit and bridle, do they fit?
Shit, what would I do if I quit?
Eat strawberries and drink champagne upon a grassy counterpane.

With love, Lucyann O'Mahoney (written 11/6/99)

▪ .

I am **fired by anger, and a commitment to fairness**. This determination has found expression in almost everything that I do. My commitment to fairness did not start here however, with this bullying. This is not a story of revelations, or of personality transplant. This is what I mean about bullying and my experiences of it providing definition, shape. I recall an event in my early school life, probably aged 9. I had a fight at school with a girl called Wendy. I know it is an important memory because I am not usually good at retaining names. I can even still see her face, and remember feeling sort of absurd wrestling with her in the playground. I don't remember what the fight was about. I do remember that we were punished in very different ways. I was a bright, popular and middle-class girl, normally well-behaved if precocious and big-headed. Wendy was working class and not very good at handing in her homework, getting things right in class, and she definitely got into more trouble. I was reprimanded, and she was banned from going swimming for the next week. No-one tried to resolve what the fight was about. And my memory of this is that I complained because the punishments weren't fair.

Looking back now I was probably pretty priggish about it and I am sure some of my motivation was even then driven by a feeling of superiority, a snobbishness based on my class. And there was certainly a bit of me that wanted to be more severely punished to show what a rebel I could be. If I am honest I still have to check myself for my motives with regard to the work I do now, to be sure that I am not motivated by an out-dated do-gooding, helping-those-who-can't-help-themselves sort of mentality. The repeated cycle of bullying in my life has been a reminder that it is for me that I do these things, just as much as for others.

I joined the Anti-Nazi League young, and rocked against racism through my teens. I did benefits and collected money for the miners in 1984. I joined the Central America Human Rights Committees and made trips to Guatemala and El Salvador. I remember saying to my lecturer in a university class that I would not be party to her humiliation of a fellow student, and recall the look of astonishment on the faces of my peers. I told the Colombian Presidential Advisor for Displaced Persons that I did not think it acceptable for him to shout at his secretary as he accused her of screwing up our appointment, especially as I knew it was he who had done so. I made a commitment to read at least a book a year about the holocaust, be it the precision autobiographical work of Primo Levi or the beauty of Anne Michaels' literary poetics, lest I forget. I wrote my Masters dissertation on violence against women in Guatemala. What this means is that I have spent my life reflecting on this, it is ingrained, deep, powerful. It is also the most obvious thread in the knot. **Person bullied resolves to fight injustice**.

Questioning

When I started this research, I wrote in bold letters ***I loathe being asked questions about myself.*** I also wrote this line: ***I am a sophisticated questioner***. In asking myself questions about what had happened to me, what meaning to make of it, I started to inquire into my self as a question-former, or rather one who responds in conscious and also embodied ways to her environment by asking questions. I have come close to understanding that my inquiry-filled response to my environment, my nosey curiosity, was probably something feared by those who bullied me. Also that being bullied led me to **resist being seen**, inspected too closely, and I began resisting others' questions about me by using questions of them as a defence. One outcome of this is that **my own**

capacity for bullying others finds easy expression in interrogation or berating, and that I have to work hard to see that my anger does not corrupt my intention to connect with others, through questioning activity. And **I have also come to see** that my commitment to asking the important questions is a way of refusing to accept the dominant accepted reality, resisting easy explanations that can make us lazy, hazy, docile and complicit.

> *'A person who possesses the 'art' of questioning is a person who is able to prevent the suppression of questions by the dominant opinion' (Gadamer, 1975, p. 330)*

So, this is also a story of refusing to be rejected or disconnected, of a dogged determination to be a force for good through the power of human connectivity, despite my fear of exposure.

Shapechanging

Despite my best intentions to frighten and expose and be angry, there is a growing appreciation through this process of a certain ability I have to **embody** the other, in ways I don't fully understand. This embodiment is easy to talk about when I enclose it in the world of 'acting', yet it has power and presence when I am not acting, and seems to be as important in my practice as anything I can explain more wordily. I have come to understand this more and more through five years of conversation with my partner in PhD effort, Eleanor Lohr (Draft Ph D Submission, Love in Organisations), whose understanding of her own embodied sense-making has led me to begin to articulate how my openness to the core of another is a vital part of my ability to know what the important questions are. The intention I have is that you get to understand what I mean by this in through my aesthetic responses to the art and writing of others and through the art of my own **writing**.

These are the first **threads**: **bullying, activism, questioning, shape-changing.** You begin, I hope, to have a grip on the importance of my **values** of fairness and solidarity. They tell you much about why I do what I do.

> *'In my explanations for my educative influence my values constitute the reasons for why I do things. I think of my values as embodied in what I do.' (Whitehead & Delong, 2003, p. 195)*

These threads hint at my **inquiring** and angry **responses**, they give you a taste of **embodied connection** with my environment, and my search for **creative transformation**.

My intention here is that you the reader now have hold of the string. As I write I am keeping in mind my standards of judgement. My hope is that you are beginning to discern how I work to stay connected and distanced enough to work, and how **my values operate in everything I do**. I would like you to get a vision of me, as an embodied, fleshly, alive person, acting in the world and not just on this page. I am seeking to transform my world through writing and into writing that explores the edge between the lived and the relived for others.

Next there is attempted explanation about the way I am and the way I make sense, leading us into the complexity of knots, nets, threads and exposing the interwoven, messy, unresolved journey of greater knowing, and not knowing enough. It shows you what I know about my capacity for forming questions, and my embodied responses to my

contextual field, aspects that are essential for understanding how I act to channel my anger into forging stronger relationships, and greater expansiveness.

But first...

Writing interlude one

'I know what I know through the process of writing. It is in the writing down that the revelation happens. I don't write down what I know, I begin to know something as a consequence of writing. **It is in writing that clarity comes. I write myself into knowledge.**'
(Madeline Church, middle of the night, full moon, 26 August 2004)

The middle of the night is often a time when I wake with a thought whittling away at sleep, and I must get up and write it down. Writing it down is the only way it can be held. It is then available for me to work with.

In seeking a way to talk meaningfully about methodology, epistemology and ontology in this research, I keep coming back to writing.

Writing – creating a body of work

> *'The poetic self is willing to put itself on the line and to take risks. These risks are predicated on a simple proposition: this writer's personal experiences are worth sharing with others. Messy texts make the writer a part of the writing project.' (Denzin, 1997, p. 225)*

Writing has been going on from the gun. All this writing you see here has been refined, reworked, rethought. All of it. I have been ruthless in throwing out or rewriting the bits I like best, starting again, threading it all together in a different way. It is not possible simply to edit things together, the sense changes as you start again. The knowledge and understanding emerges as I begin with an idea for the fifteenth time. Anything that is resisting being brought together needs to be left apart. Start again. Reorder.

Writing is where the methodological, the writing act, meets the epistemological. It is both how I come to know what I know, and it is a knowing act in and of itself. I begin to know more by meeting myself and my words on a page, of transforming what I sense into a language set which only exists in the written, and is qualitatively different from the spoken. I am constantly becoming myself as I write; my knowledge creates me as I create it. Thus the 'who I am', the ontological, becomes transformed in the act of knowing and coming to know that is the writing process.

> *'The writer produces text, and he or she produces more than text. The writer produces himself or herself. As Satre might say: the writer is the product of his own product. Writing is a kind of self-making or forming. To write is to measure the depth of things, as well as come to a sense of one's own depth.' (van Manen, 1997, pp. 126-7)*

Writing is a core way through which I make sense, and make myself known to myself. I carry a notebook at all times, and they are full of reflective short paragraphs full of questions. I do not write a journal, I have never been able to bear the unformed burbling of my attempts. But I carry a notebook or two, and they are chaotically used. I tend to write as it comes, a process I recognise in Goldberg's book about writing, *Writing Down the Bones* (1986). My work notebooks are full of odd sights I see, or thoughts I need to record. Other notebooks have bits of creative writing I suddenly get moved to, slotted in

around meeting notes, or things I have to do for some job or other. I never date anything, and I often don't have the same notebook with me when I am following on a pattern of reflection. I made the decision a while back that this is just the way I work, however hard I try to shift this pattern it never seems to shift.

What I have come to know is that this piecemeal record is the way I make sense, the way I gather in all the bits of context and relationships and communication that is in some way related to what I am processing. I will ask myself and others questions that are running around my brain. I have a tendency to put things 'out there' and see what comes back. I may not reveal my self in this process, but I will ask questions that seem to 'arise' (Collingwood, 1939) and, like Marshall (1995, 2001), my writings and note taking and noticing will tend to coalesce around this or that question. In that sense ideas and puzzles come to the surface, and sort of bubble out. I seem to be good at forming questions around them, which I plant in the world outside my physical frame. Then I nudge them around, they shift and shape-change as partial responses are formed from others. In this way, I gather in, and let out, a kind of breathing exercise I think. It certainly feels similar to this description by Rayner of connection to an outer, collective self:

> *'Inspiration from the outer, collective aspect of our complex self enables our inner space, individual aspect to grow and thrive. Expiration to our outer aspect brings scope for renewal and transformation.' (Rayner, 2004)*

And then at a certain moment I gain some certainty. This for instance is the way decisions get made in my life. An attempt to make a decision actively about something important is often fruitless. My normal way is to plant the question that the decision is a response to (Collingwood again) and as the question gets modified though the responses, the decision comes nearer to being brought into form and being. Very often, what is then 'decided' is the only way to go. There is no other way. The act of writing, often with a pen on paper, is a medium through which this sense-making happens for me.

Being a part and apart

These words, 'being a part and apart' first appear in the one diary I ever kept. I was living in El Salvador, in a tin shack in a rural community, at the extreme edge of my intention to 'be alongside' others. These were people dispossessed by war, brutalised by years of fighting.

These words have carried me along with them, and have constantly reappeared as I have written my way through this research. How can I be apart and a part simultaneously?

> *'Writing constantly seeks to make external what somehow is internal. We come to know what we know in this dialectic process of constructing a text (a body of knowledge) and thus learning about what we are capable of saying (our knowing body). It is the dialectic of inside and outside, of embodiment and disembodiment, or separation and reconciliation. '(van Manen, 1997, p. 127)*

This dialectic of inside and outside, which I experience most profoundly through writing, is not just about a notion of inside and outside my body and being. It is about my being

both inside, a part of, and outside, apart from the world around me. This separate connectedness is in some sense at the centre of the research. It is also the way of doing the research, through what Winter *et al.* describe as 'artistic structuring of experience'.

> *'An artistic structuring of experience is an attempt by an individual to create meaning by picking a way through the various ideological structures which always threaten to predetermine the meaning of our lives. It expresses, at the same time, commitment and detachment, freedom and constraint.' (Winter, et al., 1999, p. 205)*

Being simultaneously in and out, a part and apart, is where my sense of being, my ontology, cannot be separated from either the methodology of doing (writing, conversing, writing) or the understanding of what I know.

Writing has thus been the way of doing this research. Reflection becomes meaningful and hopefully intelligible in the act of text construction. The writing was the start, and through the writing the form has come into focus, has been gradually revealed in the written, and in my relationship to the written words.

> *'As we stare at the paper, and stare at what we have written, our objectified thinking now stares back at us. Thus our writing creates the reflective, cognitive stance that generally characterises the theoretic attitude in the social sciences.' (van Manen, 1997, p. 125)*

This staring at the paper also shows me that I am more than I thought, and different from what I thought I am. I often find myself hard to find in my own words. I wonder 'who wrote this?' I am frequently amazed. Here I am somehow embodied, and yet not recognisable. Something meaningful has happened as my thoughts are crafted into words. And it is often when my theorising happens.

It is as if I only begin to discern what I know when I make it text. This creation of a 'body of knowledge' allows me to distance myself, and in that distancing process come nearer to the essence.

Writing as transformation - Writing myself in by writing myself out

The body of the Bullying story

Writing is creative. Through writing I not only make myself more than I was, but what I know becomes communicable to others, knowledge that can transcend just myself. Let me try and show you how the act of writing, the act of creative writing, reveals new depths, and simultaneously creates knowledge of myself, in a way which has transformed this research. The piece about bullying is a good example. It demonstrates rather clearly what I mean by the **creative act of writing leading to transformation**.

I have always written stories out of my experiences; it is a way of thinking my self out of the inner. As Winter *et al.* state so succinctly, 'we don't store experience (as though it were 'information' or 'data'); we story it. Creating stories is, simply, one of the modes in which we comprehend our lives.' (1999, p. 210) It is also a way of creating a different experience, a transformative act.

I wrote the 'story' early in this research process. I had written about and spoken about that experience many hundreds of times between age 11 and 39. Those retellings had never shifted anything.

This time, I stepped outside of myself in it, and by doing so transformed my relation to it. The choice to write in the third person, and in the present tense, has a curious effect being very present and very personal, in a way that writing in the first person somehow doesn't. I wanted the reader to receive the visceral impact of this experience, and in so doing it had somehow to be not me, not I, but a third person, who was at the same time Madeline. For me, the writer, the placing of Madeline out there in a peculiar way creates a new 'I'. It feels like standing inside by standing outside, and somehow enables a reader to stand inside by me standing outside.

The first person writing, the second half, is less affecting, more explanatory, and is an attempt to communicate to the outside by standing inside. It is intentionally designed to provide context and reflection, and show something of how my experience and my values have shaped the choices I have made not just about the work I choose to do, but about the way I do that work.

And lastly, the use of quotes gives the piece uncontained boundaries, as if to anchor it in to a world beyond. This represents an urge to connect with others' ideas, show you how I am influenced, in subtle ways, by linking out to the way others speak, and how what they say illuminates what I say.

These are the beginnings of what I see now as the very body of this research, its early definition. This telling of the story of bullying in my life shows the traces of an emerging form. This moves between first person, third person, third person as first person, first person connected to third persons' writing, and I begin myself to find that the hard edged definitions of 'I', 'you', and 'we' fail me when I am trying to explain how I operate in an interconnected world.

The day I wrote the piece, and shared it with my supervision group, and a member of the group shared it with a work colleague, who then shared a piece she had written about her experiences with me, on this day my experience no longer had the power to make me grieve. I had written about this experience in confessional autobiographical mode before, I had told many people about this before. But I had never told it in this way, never attempted to bring the reader into a creative relationship with it before, by standing outside myself. Since that day I have noticed that **the process of writing is a creative and reflective act** for me. It was a powerful moment of transformation, writing as transformation.

Winter *et al.* discuss the links between the writing of fiction and professional reflection in ways that resonate with what I am seeking to do here. They see the two activities as having been artificially separated, with professional work increasingly distanced from the potential of the human imagination. Imagination, in their terms, combines 'mental agility and resourcefulness' with 'the creative faculty which shapes the raw material of experience into *artistic* form' (1999, p. 1, original emphasis).

Such imagination is crucial for the richness of 'the reflective paradigm', by which they means those ideas posited by Schon, amongst others. This paradigm

> *'emphasises the creativity of human subjectivity: experience is not simple a succession of 'actions' or 'behaviours' which can be directly observed, but a complex process including unconscious residues from long-forgotten events. 'Understanding' therefore requires*

more than observation; it requires us to engage in a process of introspection leading to self-clarification.' (Winter et al., 1999, p. 186)

In their terms, I might be seen as attempting 'to remove the traditional cultural barrier between the activity of writing fiction and the activity of professional reflection.' (p. 182)

Through this process I am seeking to get nearer to the world of my experience, and to the world in which my experience happens. In van Manen's phenomenological terms, this is akin to 'intentionality' or an inseparable connectedness to the inquiry (1997, p. 31). He recognises that inquiry 'is always the project of someone: a real person, who..sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence,' (*ibid.*). It is my experience that writing is the central way I make sense of experience. This is how I 'turn to the nature of lived experience', and bring to it the fullness of attention that van Manen describes. It allows me to bring it into sight, and bring it to speech, 'questioningly letting that which is being talked about be seen' (*ibid.* p. 33). It allows me to create knowledge through a distanced yet connected position to the inquiry question. This means not just standing 'in the fullness of life, in the midst of the world of living relations and shared situations,' (*ibid.* p. 32) but in paying careful, thoughtful attention to what it is like.

'From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings. As since to know the world is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching–questioning-theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to become the world.' (van Manen, 1997, p. 5)

WAYS OF BEING AND KNOWING: THE ONTOLOGICAL, EPISTEMOLOGICAL, METHODOLOGICAL TRIANGLE

Ways of knowing - finding the images

This section moves into a more detailed explanation about the way I inquire and the way I make sense. This means engaging your attention and understanding about what I experience as an interwoven, messy, unresolved journey of greater knowing, and not knowing enough. For this to be possible, I have to reach out for **images** and pictures, **knots, nets, threads, spaghetti, hyphens** and **hyperlinks**, and illustrate my sense-making by showing it in my responses to **the artistic endeavour of others**.

It shows you what I know about my capacity for **forming questions**, which is intricately bound up with my **embodied responses** to my surroundings. These aspects are essential for understanding how I act to channel my anger into forging stronger relationships, and greater expansiveness.

Lastly, the **writing** of the knowing is again a process of knowledge creation. I repeat, I don't write down what I know, I begin to know something as a consequence of writing. As I work my way through this presentation of my knowledge, as I write and rewrite, edit and add, I am **processing, reflecting, surfacing and examining what I think I know**.

While not explicitly following the hermeneutic phenomenological six activities of van Manen's referred to in the Introduction, I have sought to hold as a reference point the qualities he refers to in this quotation:

> *'its method requires an ability to be reflective, insightful, sensitive to language and constantly open to experience.' (van Manen, 1997, p. xi)*

This demands that I reflect on essential themes, and continue to inquire into what makes this thing this and not that, revealing the obscurity, what van Manen repeatedly calls the 'ineffableness' of a thing (pp. 31-33). It feels to me about bringing together the whole and the part, of seeking essences but not reducing to essences. It means a determined relation to the thing. It is dogged, a refusal to settle for niceties or to skim. It is a commitment to penetrate, and to be penetrated by the inquiry.

k/Not knowing

Five years on and I am still sitting at my computer seeking a way to present my research. Reading more, writing again, reading, writing, looking out of the window at the garden. I hold my head in my hands, again, tired of the struggle, again. I grab a pen, one of those that irritatingly blobs ink when you stop and think, and these words appear on a piece of scrap paper.

k/not knowing is the answer. I am not striving to unknot the knot of not knowing,

I am striving to appreciate just how knotted the knowing may be.
Unknotting will not unknot the knot of not knowing.
Maybe tying myself in knots is the only way to know.

I look at it; write it in an email to Jack, my supervisor and to Eleanor, my peer Phd-er.

I go downstairs, make a cup of coffee, have a smoke.

As I sit, and contemplate the words, what originally looks to me like the most annoying kind of pretentious word-play becomes momentarily full of light. I have been working with the image of threads, knots and nets for two years now. It weaves its way through the Action Research Project on international networks and evaluation (see Episode One), and has literally held me together in my wrestling match with the form of this doctorate. I have been seeking a way to ensure that this image and ones like it, breathe life into a linear form, and hold the research together in a way that reflects the networked way I live, think, work and make sense. This is important not just for substance, or content, the 'what' of the research. It is essential for the writing and reading of it. van Manen puts it more simply:

> *'by "organizing one's writing" we do not merely concern ourselves with the problem of superficially ordering or rearranging the text. Rather we search for a sense of organizational form and organic wholeness of the text consistent with the methodological emphasis of the research approach.' (van Manen, 1997, p. 168)*

I would again add that is about integrating my being in this world (ontology), my knowing in this world (epistemology), with my doing in this world (methodology).

k/not knowing is certainly one response to the on-going questions about what I know and how I come to know. It speaks to my epistemology of practice, my way of being in the world, and my methodology in both research and work. It combines the driving force of 'not knowing' - something which urges me on to ask questions, to inquire further, to research - with the imagery of 'knot-knowing' – of respecting and working with the complexity of knots, threads, and nets. It also indicates the kind of process I go through with any piece of work – tying myself in knots, as I wind my way round the complex structure of something I am trying to understand, working with it without unravelling it.

Not knowing

Reason and Bradbury (2001b) write a lot about knowing, and different forms of knowing, as do many others who write about doing research. Not knowing doesn't get much of a mention in general.

Yet not knowing keeps me going, keeps me inquiring, and keeps me alive. If there is one thread that has kept me going throughout this five year period of doing a doctorate, it is the underlying sense that I do not know. I started this research degree without knowing what I wanted to inquire into. Every time I have come to a state of knowing something, my not knowing some other thing has kept me moving forward. This is what it is like to be in a state of ever-shifting curiosity.

In almost the first thing I wrote for this research, I was asking myself about **questions**. Questioning seemed to me then, and continues to seem to me now, the primary way I

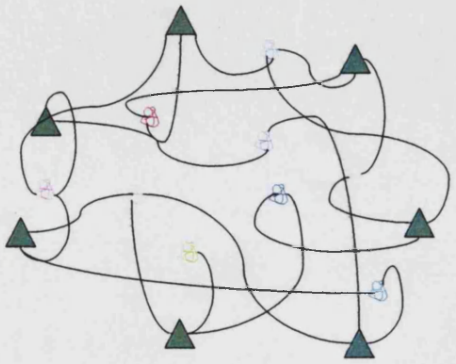
operate in the world. I question almost everything. I am often the infuriating person in any gathering who will question the question. This urge to unfold what is underneath (Bohm, 1987) to bring into the light the implicate, is as natural to me as my breath, in many ways easier. The act of **breathing in and breathing out, of making connection and releasing connection**, is for me a process of inquiring, revealing, internalising, and externalising. With every act of inquiry I find a new inquiry, something more to know, something endless. Knowing is never complete. Humberto Maturana (A day with Humberto Maturana) says that knowledge is the enemy of reflection, that when we have knowledge, we cease to inquire, cease to ask questions of what we know. While this makes me feel slightly better, the truth is that the process of coming to an end with this piece of research is almost painful. I do not know how to end. I thought my problem was that I didn't know how to present what I know. What presentational form to mould my knowing into, so that you, the reader, could make sense of what I know, and as such decide if my knowing would help your knowing. At the moment I think that really what I am resisting is the idea of claiming to know, at least something finite and finished.

This questioning and inquiring process is rigorous, it is tiring. It is always incomplete. And it is also organic; it grows in ways that cannot be foreseen.

Questions, however, the outward and inward ????, are the seen and heard aspects of how I am in the world. 'You always home in on the difficult questions,' is a way I am described by fellow professionals in whatever I am doing. I work in jobs which have questions as their underlying methodology – evaluation, mediation. I examine and question my motives, values, and interaction, to an extent that keeps me awake and that I find intolerable at times. **I am capable of extremes of interrogation**, as well as the easy joys of wooing, and my not-knowing is not always served by my questioning. Like bullying, questions are knotted into the fabric of me, and they are linked in complex ways.

Knot knowing

During the research process that culminated in Working Paper 121 and the process described in Episode One, in the third year of my doctorate, the shift in conceptual understanding happened when I met **knots**. We had been working with images of networks taken largely from computer language, of nodes linked together by connecting threads. When I began to see that individuals or institutions were only linked by the connecting threads if those threads made meaning along the way, and that meaning comes through what ties us together, the activities we undertake together, and the relationships required to do those things together, only then did I begin to see the importance of knots.



And I only now am beginning to see how they help to describe my methodology, the way in which I have sought to know what I present to you here. The way in which I have come to present it in this way, the way I have got from there to here, is in itself an example of this way of searching, and researching.

Threads and hyphens, spaghetti, knots and nets

My research is often a process of following threads, while holding some loose inquiry in mind. This wanting to know more generates huge complexity, especially when I am seeking to communicate it to others. I often end up with complicated knots that are very difficult to 'show' to others. My experience of trying to write about these knots is that if I try to unknot them and talk about them they begin to lose their meaning. Somehow, my challenge with this work is **to allow these knots to hold a web of meaning together**, a net that both catches meaning and holds meaning, sustains meaning, without it all unravelling and dropping us both on the floor. It is also true that the net goes on growing, despite the fact that I am trying to put an end to it here, in this paper.

When I first read this quote, during the Action Research Project, it was as if someone had whispered a truth into my ear. It remains one of the few images that make sense to me of how I make sense of the world.

> *'The Atom is the past. The symbol of science for the next century is the **dynamical** Net. ...Whereas the Atom represents clean simplicity, the Net channels the **messy** power of **complexity**..The only organization capable of nonprejudiced growth or unguided learning is a network. All other topologies limit what can happen. A network **swarm** is all edges and therefore **open ended** any way you come at it. Indeed the network is the least structured organization that can be said to have any structure at all. ..In fact a **plurality** of truly **divergent** components can only remain coherent in a network. No other arrangement – chain, pyramid, tree, circle, hub – can contain true **diversity** working as a **whole**.' (Kevin Kelly, cited in footnote, Castells, 1996 p. 61. Emphasis added)*

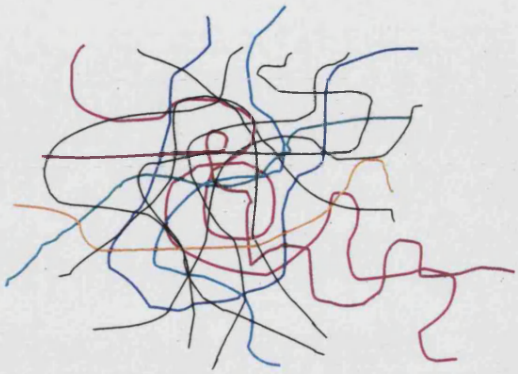
The words that leap out at me are dynamical, messy, complexity, swarm, open-ended, plurality, divergent, diversity, whole. Such words could imply lack of organisation, incoherence, a swampy mess. Yet put like this, I feel as if I have found a way to explain how it is that I put things together, and how I might explain them to others, without them falling off the page in chaos.

Each part I talk about here, in this paper, is threaded together with every other part. They knot together, make meaning together, and hold the whole, while continuing to thread and make more meaning.

Interestingly, when van Manen writes about pulling together a piece of phenomenological research into themes, he also uses the metaphor of knots:

> *'Metaphorically speaking [themes] are more like knots in the web of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes..... Rather than objects or generalisations they are 'fasteners' or 'foci' or threads around which the phenomenological description is facilitated.' (1997, pp. 90-91)*

Spaghetti



Another way into this sense-making is through the metaphor of spaghetti. It is a different but sufficiently similar visual image to that of the net. Just as the net image emerged out of my asking questions of my practice, inquiring into my practice and that of others working together in networks, so this image emerged out of inquiring into my practice in Colombia.

A plate of spaghetti has many qualities. There is any number of strands of spaghetti, each separate, but intertwined. You can follow any strand from one end to the other, and en route you find it intertwined with a number of others. If you tug on one strand, everything moves and slides, together at first and then separately. However, once you remove a strand, the whole significantly alters.

I have used this image for most of the time I have been working in the highly contested arena of analysing and interpreting what happens in Colombia and what should be done, politically, in policy and practical terms, to improve things. Such contests are real, and often lead to violent death. It is easy, often essential, to find yourself in a comforting space, where you share an analysis with others, and have a ready-made political home in which you all agree. I have never been comfortable with easy answers, and tend toward the belief that there is never one truth or one story.

If I hold the spaghetti image in mind, it helps me to work with such political demands, and hold on to the personal resolve to inquire and question. It importantly prevents me from seizing up, corroding if you like, faced with the overwhelming pressure to take sides in a brutal, vicious, and corrupting conflict.

Colombia is a complex and large country. Everyone connected to it has their own route through it, and their own story to tell about it. Those working in the State institutions at the regional level will have one strand, those working to defend human rights another, those working in a business in the city another, rural poor farmers another. On the way they will meet and intersect with a variety of others, each on their route, but they will never see the whole, nor experience contact with some of their fellow Colombians. These intersections can be planned or random, they maybe the result of family ties, or linked careers in different spheres. Where these intersections occur is where the

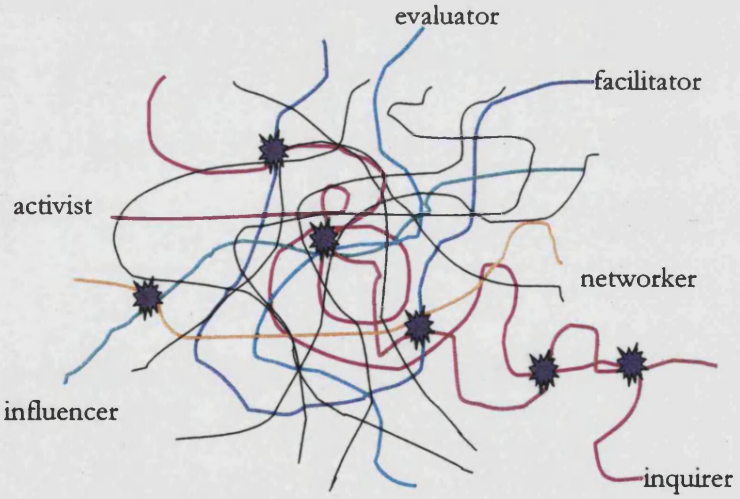
possibilities, I believe, of understanding between stories can and do happen, and where part of the knotting together of the social fabric happens. Holding this metaphor in my head helps me to grasp that the stories of my contacts and friends are both real and partial, whole and limited. It also gives me access to hope. These stories are rarely simple, and they have contacts and friends on other strands, maybe even enemy strands.

All those routes and stories are linked in other ways to people outside the country, to the dead and yet to be born, and in the imagination of each person. This spaghetti is uncontained, with each strand worming its way through the fabric of our world.

As a metaphor, with all its limits, it is more illuminating than most others for me and more useful when it comes to 'accounting for myself and my work' in this thesis.

It has resonance when I come to write, for instance, about my working practice as an evaluator. The core defining feature of that work is a commitment to ensure that I encounter all the perspectives possible, and incorporate a complex view of those many perspectives when I write up reports, and give feedback on projects I am evaluating. It is both a 'personalising' approach (Kushner, 2000) and a complexity approach.

But it also helps me to visualise what I am doing here, in seeking 'to reveal and bring to life a whole version of the 'who I am, what I do, and why I do it', using my full creative powers' (see Third standard of judgement, Introductory Framing). This involves bringing you into relation with the routes I am taking through this exercise in self-reflective inquiry.



I am weaving in and around the strands in my working life, evaluator, facilitator, networker, etc, in an attempt to show you the fullest picture I can, without losing meaning through separation.

Hyphens and Links

Thirdly in terms of making sense, I tend to work with a kind of multi-dimensional attachment or connection, a kind of 'extension' out into other disciplines, bodies of thought, and embodied senses.

Many years ago, I went to see the comedian Ken Campbell, a truly inspired and anarchic thinker, do one of his one-man shows. The image I have retained ever since is his examination of the full-stop. For Ken Campbell, a full-stop is only a full-stop in this sentence in this dimension.

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If you look horizontally along a full-stop you it becomes a hyphen and links you into another dimension altogether. If you follow it, it will lead you into another plane. It is the original hyperlink. In this sentence here, a full-stop is an end. The end. Yet if you let it operate as a hyphen, it can link you to another series of thoughts, images, metaphors, poems, memories, dreams.

This hyper-linking through hyphens is a way of describing how my researching and sense-making happens. I will often find myself linking out to another body of knowledge – art, sculpture, poetry, literature, musical lyrics, physics, - as I immerse myself in this one. And I have found that if I follow the links, interesting, inspirational and interconnecting ideas begin to flow. I have always read voraciously, never wanting to put out the light, copying out passages or quotes that speak to me. The whispering in my ear of faint connections, of half-remembered dreams, of voices that echo my own, of voices speaking back to me, these passages of texts, snippets of songs, poetry, lines in a play, these particles....these are my sub-atomic particles, my inter-connections, that lead me into and through other dimensions of thought and imagination and are what I would consider to be my mapping. My mind clearly thinks in networked, knotted, linked and hyphenated ways. Mapping not measuring, complexity not reductionism, I am a creature of the maze and labyrinth.

There's no plan to it, other than an intuitive 'this speaks to me' and a commitment not to lose hold of it. I am a natural multi-disciplinarian, and while I have often criticised myself for my pick and mix approach, it is the way I make sense of the world.

What all these images have in common is their knotted, interwoven and threaded-linked nature. I am asking you to hold these images and metaphors in mind as I guide you around the knots and threads in my research, and help you to understand the hyphenated, linked nature of the methodology I use to understand, and represent it. There will be routes through, like the strands of spaghetti, which I will endeavour to trace for you. There will be knots, in which a full comprehension of what I am talking about will involve weaving over and under and around, and may tie two or more strands together in a complex three-dimensional figure.

There will be hyphens - to other revealing pieces of writing, others' sense-making, poetry, music and art, other spaces which illuminate and extend what I am talking about. And by the 'end' of this document, there will be a net, maybe not very well-made, undoubtedly with holes, which seeks to hold us – you reader and me writer – above the

ground of incomprehension, and provide a light enough structure for further questions to be asked. As such I am interested in creating what Denzin calls a 'reflexive text':

> *'a model of truth that is narrative, deeply ethical, open ended, and conflictual, performance and audience based, and always personal, biographical, political, structural, and historical.' (1997, pp. 266-7)*

and one which recognises the complex form that any knowing to-not-knowing-and-on..... inevitably has. I am hoping for:

> *'a fuller description of the structure of a lived experience.' (van Manen, 1997, p. 92)*

My intention then is to reveal to you the diverse nature of the components, working as a whole, with the understanding that this is a growing body channelling the messy power of complexity, something that has structure in the most unstructured way possible.

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In Broken Images
Robert Graves

He is quick, thinking in clear images;
I am slow, thinking in broken images.

He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images;
I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images.

Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;
Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.

Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact;
Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.

When the fact fails him, he questions his senses;
When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.

He continues quick and dull in his clear images;
I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.

He in a new confusion of his understanding;
I in a new understanding of my confusion.

-.

Ways of being - shape-changing and questioning

> *'Taking a personal self-reflective approach to research means valuing and working with ..various processes, appreciating the subtle interplay of inner and outer worlds, and treating all this as data...Evolving, living, sense-making of this sort cannot be hurried.' (Marshall, 1992, p. 286)*

There are two aspects of the way I am, and what I have come to understand about the way that being finds expression in my work, that this section will deal with: shape-changing, or embodied knowing, and the art of forming questions. They are intricately connected, and have begun to take a certain shape, or form, as I have sought to look critically at them, and experience them bodily, over this period of time. They are tied into the fabric of bullying, and of standing firm in the face of injustice, and they are in some opaque sense part of my search for compassion through anger and my artistry.

My intention here is to draw you deeper in to an understanding of what I know about my connections outside myself. I am trying to reveal how those connections are channelled by my inquiring body-mind, where my embodied knowledge and questioning tendency reinforce one another. This is really challenging to explain, or make known to others. I write about it in a variety of ways.

You may ask why this is important, at least for you, the reader, to know. Actually, I ask 'why is this important?' It is important because it leads us into the centre of the methodological, ontological, epistemological triangle. My hope is that we don't vanish.

Shape-changing and embodied connection

Let me start where it starts.

Cast your mind back to the Back Story, the story of bullying and transformation.

I have come to see that the profound experience that bullying was for me, had in some way to do with my sense of the **boundary to my self**, one I have always experienced as fluid and porous. My embodied reaction to that bullying was one of internal sickness; the poison of that connection literally entered me. And that porous boundary, however hard I tried to close it up, has remained porous and intermingled throughout my life, despite my best efforts.

Rayner would argue that it is a misconception to imagine that we can ever fix boundaries and stay alive:

> *'It is..at boundaries that all life's action occurs – the places where nature (genetic influences) and nurture (outside influences) combine and inextricably intertwine to generate the rich complexity of the living world. These boundaries can never be completely fixed, but instead define the ever-changing contexts, the local environments within and between which life processes are transacted across scales of organisation ranging from microscopic to global.' (1997, p. 4)*

It is curious that osmotic and balancing feedback processes are well-known and written about in the biological sciences, in which cells and their surrounding contexts operate in delicate interdependency, and yet we somehow resist the idea of their relevance to us as thinking and embodied human beings moving in the world.

This piece of writing recreates but one of many similar experiences I have had throughout my life, and is a reasonable example of what Merleau-Ponty describes as the

> *'certain ways the outside has of invading us and certain ways we have of meeting the invasion.' (cited in Reason & Marshall, CD Rom).*

Body in Writing

I am on the train to Bath to attend a workshop on phenomenology. My bag is on the seat next to me. A woman asks if the seat is taken. I say no, and move my bag onto my lap. This is my first act of defence. I am reading 'Researching Lived Experience' – the glossary section. I have just come to 'symbolic interactionism'. I am interested in this phrase as it is one Kimmett, my partner, uses in his research.

The woman is moving back and forth from the seat, putting things up above, getting things down. I have not looked at her or engaged her eye. I am reading, taking notes. I do not want to be disturbed.

Yet I can feel a disturbance already. My edges are zinging. I can feel the approaching attempt at connection brewing. It is always this way.

I crunch myself into my seat. Angle my notebook and textbook toward the window. I can feel myself hugging the wall.

She makes little harrumphing noises, those kind of sighing-please-ask-me-about-my-day and-my-journey sort of noises. I know she is looking at me as she does this.

I read more intently.

'Symbolic interactionists understand social reality as a complex network of interacting persons, who symbolically interpret their acting in the social world. The methodological rule is that social reality and society should be understood from the perspective of the actors who interpret their world through and in social interaction.' (van Manen, 1997, p. 186)

I catch myself on the word 'network' as I always do. It is always complex.

The woman is beginning to eat. She suddenly says 'would you like a dried mango?' to the man sitting opposite. He is startled; she has caught him looking at her. He laughs. She thrusts the packet at him. He takes one. She offers a mango to his neighbour. The net is closing in. He declines. Finally she asks me.

I turn to her and she locks onto my eyes, absolutely on fire. I feel like a fish, hooked through the mouth.

I say 'no thanks' and smile and turn away. Now I begin to wonder how she would interpret this exchange. I know I am holding it in my research question about how my embodied connection to others works. It is such a familiar experience, yet it is always disturbing. I can feel the urge to smoke. To cut off connection. To refuse to breathe in connection with the world. I am thinking, shall I buy some roll-ups? Take Jack to the pub so I can smoke? Or shall I bear it, carry it, can I bear it?

Breathing in, breathing out, connecting, disconnecting. This feels interminable. Of course it is, until you die.

She moves to another seat at Reading. She again moves up and down, stuffing things in, pulling things out. Every noise this woman makes is penetrating. She is eating crisps, and the crunch is extraordinarily loud. There are other sounds, people talking to colleagues, to phone companies, husbands, but they merge somehow. Just the bite into a crisp, right inside my skin.

Here I am, highly attuned to the person-ness of this woman. Part of this experience is me knowing that they can sense that I am open, porous, available for connection. It is as if I am wearing a big sign around my neck. I recall Lucy, the girl cartoon character in Peanuts, who had that sign 'The Doctor is In'. It feels a bit like that, although I am not about to cure anyone and nor do I seek anonymity. I like to talk to people on trains, and often do.

For many years I have experienced this as a continuing struggle to stay defended and connected at the same time. To be both apart and a part.

I have carried this phrase 'being apart from and a part of' around with me for ten years. It seems to hold a kind of explanatory power for what I feel I am engaged in as my life's real question – how is it that I am both connected and distanced, in and out, a part of and apart from, simultaneously, at the same time? Why do I always feel this paradox struggle every time I am in a group? Where does it come from? Why do I relentlessly seek connection, place myself in the danger zone, and then resist just as relentlessly? What does it mean, can I 'manage' and 'control' it, and is it in my power? As a phrase it has prompted me to much reflection.

An early attempt at an abstract looked like this:

> My life's learning journey has been about being a part and apart. A part of the living, breathing world and apart from it at the same time. Driven by the loneliness of a bright, non-conformist individualist, **looking for an uncompromised place to belong**.
>
> This is the simple conclusion I have come to.

Experienced at a work level I have found myself attracted to **working as a facilitator**, with groups, while simultaneously uncomfortable with any kind of group mentality. I often work on the edge of places with a so-called shared 'identity', like organisations, but know that I cannot feel at home within them. My gravitation toward **coordinating a network**, and working with networks, owes much to this paradox. While I am **a determined non-joiner, I love to work with others** in ways that liberate us to be our best selves. I delight in the joys of communication, and hate the suffocation of 'common identities' and 'corporate rules'. Networks provide sufficient social cohesion for me to feel a part, while enabling me to be dynamically myself.

Experienced at a bodily level this balancing act between connection and separation means battling with the re-emergence of that faded tattoo of bullying. The beast has many tentacles, and my anxieties about being in or out continue to grasp me round the throat. This writing is recent, after participating in a meeting/workshop about establishing a network.

> We do an exercise that is intended to gauge levels of interest in different possible activities of the network. It involves moving around the room and standing in groups. The more we do it and the more ideas get generated, the more people feel anxious about being left out. And the less specific they become. More people join everything. I start to separate myself, thinking, I don't have time, I couldn't possibly commit myself to all this stuff, I have a life, but underneath it is a familiar feeling, of resistance to groups, to belongingness, to joining, to being a part.
>
> Then people start talking about **branding**. About branding for the product of the network. The word makes my hair stand on end. Fuck, this is the real fear. Someone claims this is a neutral word. This is not a neutral word, I think. This is about marking something in fire, usually skin. This is about boxing and fixing and making up rules. It is not a simple word, it is about ownership and stamping 'mine' on things. Nothing about branding is neutral. But a good-sized group seem to be interested in working on 'branding'. My anxiety rises. I don't want to be branded. Am I in, out, teetering on the edge?
>
> This is a terribly common experience for me. If I really pay attention, I can experience the bodily turmoil it creates in me. It is not unlike the sickness I describe in my writing about being bullied. I start to close down, the film of hair drops over my eyes, and I begin to feel mute, unable to articulate. Unable to use the instrument at the centre of my being, my voice. I somehow shrink inside my skin, and while I can see out, I can't cross the boundary. I have an image branded from this moment of the workshop, of me standing alone at one end of the room, while others cluster round each other excitedly. I cannot escape my feeling of isolation. Yet I know that this keeping myself apart is also connected to very important uncomfortable questions about what community means, and how far being 'in' implies compromise of values.

This is a sampler of my experience of being a participant in groups. It is just one experience but really it could stand for any of the many times I have been in a group setting, (doing workshops seems to have taken up a lot of my working life!). It illuminates for me very clearly that I am in a constant struggle with myself about **how to be in a community, and what being 'in community' means**. The simple fact that I continue to

put myself in such situations is an indicator that I want to stay connected, however frightful the whole thing seems to be. It is also evidence that I am dogged in my commitment to finding that 'uncompromised place to belong' while retaining every ounce of my individual flair and non-conformist appreciation of the world. I will never stop asking what others see as difficult questions. My challenge is finding ways to ask them that really allow us to respond with inquiring minds.

As Eleanor said to be on the phone today, 'the thing is you didn't want to do this PhD alone'. She's right. I resist groups **and** seek the creativity of connection. I want to be a part, to be joined, **and** want to be uncompromisingly individual.

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> Yesterday in our inquiry group, S talked about the 'screen-saver' that flashes across her mind, kicking in with regularity, sometimes in big font, sometimes small, when she is about to speak in a group setting. Her screen-saver says 'So what, S, so what?', a continuing question to herself about the worth of her contribution, about whether what she has to say is of any consequence.
>
> I started to think about what my screen-saver might be. I realised that mine has probably said 'I will not join', for years and years and years. A determined expression of resistance to groups, to controlled territory. It would likely flash up on my way to participate in some group or other, or as I am sitting squirming in a room of people waiting for the spotlight to fall on me. Highly contradictory. Now it might say, 'I won't join, but I must be joined'

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I have begun to see that this 'being apart from and a part of' is related to space, to perception, to feeling. It means being on the inside of events, and on the outside, being seen from the inside and the outside, projecting my being inwards and outwards. It means being one of many, a part, and being apart, separated from. It means playing a part, while feeling outside of the part. It means holding the one and the many. It is a way of expressing my ability to stretch myself across contexts and spaces.

One **response to the questions I ask myself** about this quality comes from Rayner:

> *'Rather than asking what an individual is, it ..makes more sense to ask how individual some entity is. To decide on this depends on the degree to which the entity is connected to or disconnected from others, and to what extent it can be considered to be a "part" of a larger something or a "parcel" of smaller somethings.' (Rayner, 1997, p. 6)*

This response in many ways makes the questions no longer necessary. If I reframe my thoughts around the extent of individuality, or the extent of separate self-ness that really exists, then this dualism of connection – disconnection, apart and a part, can be transformed. I no longer have to imagine this as a dichotomy of in and out. In his most recent writings on inclusionality, Rayner suggests that :

> *'This way of understanding natural form radically affects not only the way we interpret all kinds of irreversible dynamic processes, but also the fundamental meaning of 'self' as a*

complex identity comprising inner, outer and intermediary domains, rather than an independent, single-centred entity.' (2004)

I can begin to understand imagine myself shape-changing, or stretching, with expanding and retracting boundaries, a self comprised of a number of domains.

Let me try to put this another way, or show another route. A seminal book for me was Eva Hoffman's 'Lost in Translation', her autobiographical account of being a child émigré from Poland living in Canada, and experiencing herself as being lost in the translation of herself from one world, one culture, to another. I had felt myself to be 'lost in translation' all my life, of being between worlds, of having no roots, lacking what Kushner (2000) calls a foundationalist sense of having an authoritative reference point, whether that be nationality, profession or role (p.144). What I now call stretching, shape-changing, or belonging in many worlds rather than none, was a source of existential anguish for me for many years, faced with the norm of 'being identified', or even branded, that our culture espouses.

If, as Kushner says, that, '[l]ife at the boundary, moments of transition as we pass from one context to another, tend to be moments when people are in self-reflective mode, rehearsing analyses of who they are and where they come from' (2000, p. 144), then I have been deep in this question for years.

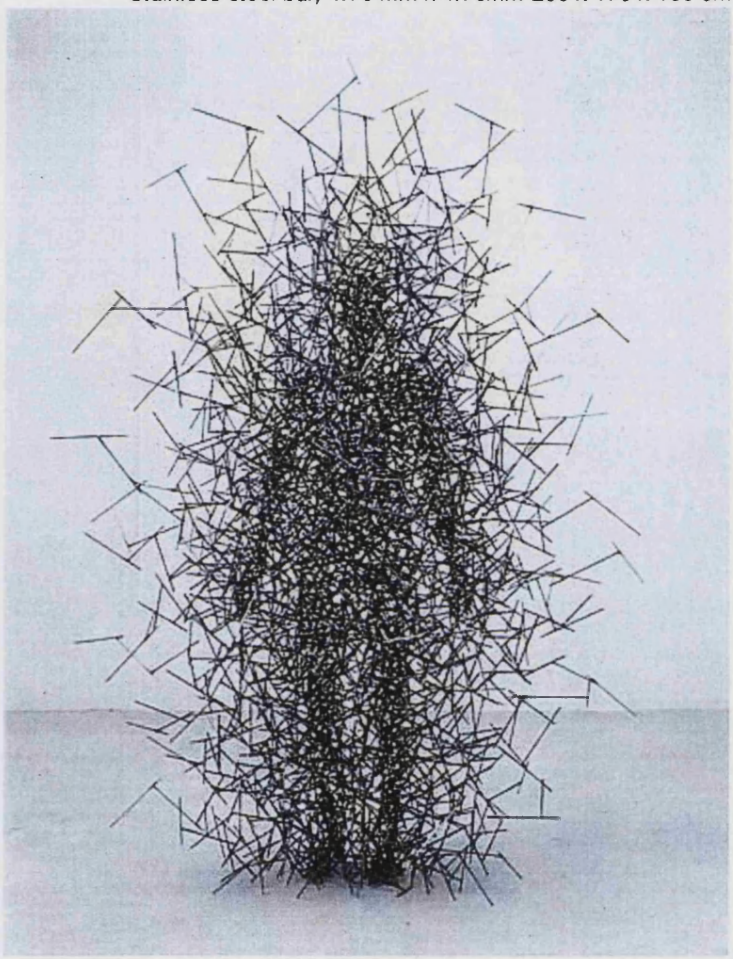
I see this framing of myself as congruent with Rayner's logic of 'space and boundaries as connective, reflective and co-creative, rather than severing' (2004). All the work I have done, and continue to do, can in some way be examined through tracing the threads of this shape-changing. Not just the way I work, but the work I choose, or which chooses me, is in some core way connected to my only partially understood capacity to hold others in myself, while simultaneously remaining uniquely me. My life as an actress is a relatively easy route into the many expressions of this shape-changing quality.

Acting

I grew up in the theatre. When I was five I remember being rewarded with squares of dairy milk chocolate that would melt in the mouth if I helped pick up the pins on the floor of the theatre wardrobe department. Our house was alive with actors, drinking too much at parties and falling into the put-up swimming pool we had erected in the back garden. We would watch from the landing window. My mother made melon filled with brandy and raspberries. My father smoked then, and my mother puffed on Hamlet cigars. I said my first line on stage when I was eight.

In the very constructed environment of live theatre, there is a real boundary, that of audience to stage, although as actors we are always running the edge to find the ways across. The boundary of actor to character is not so real, the melding of 'who we know as Madeline' and who we 'see' is weird and often disturbing. I grew up watching my father have his eyes put out as Gloucester in King Lear, executed as Thomas More, and violently abused as Wesley. There were times when we rushed back-stage in tears to make sure he was still alive. Some actors are transformed when they work, they drape themselves and become other, almost unrecognisable. Others shift at the edges, but you can hear the core of them through every spoken and gestured act. Others morph and expand, a kind of half-formed image of them remains, almost available yet somehow distorted. I think I was one of the latter.

Antony Gormley – **QUANTUM CLOUD XV** 2000
Stainless steel bar, 4.76 mm x 4.76mm 258 x 170 x 160 cm



This feels like an extraordinary energy field. It is a figure that indeed sits at the centre of a field of energy. The figure changes in definition as you sail past it on a boat, move around it, the energy shifting and patterning and revealing the man, but there is always some kind of a solid core of the earth of the man in the subtle energy of the piece, visible, almost visible, a trace, a back view, here, gone, reformed.

If I put myself back there, and hold on to a feeling of what acting was like, from the inner place it felt like shape-changing. Shape-changing inside an unbroken but porous boundary. No growing extra arms or bigger ears, but a kind of remoulding. For me the only way I could find the character would be if I could stretch and shape what I had

already, while allowing myself to be stretched and shaped by the communicative context around me.

There is a peculiar thing with learning lines. My approach was never to learn them, they learned themselves. As the character grew around me, the words made themselves known. They emerged as the obvious thing to say in the conversation. Or at least most of them did. There would always be glitches: always forgetting what came next at the same point in the scene; reworking it to find a different spatial relationship to the other actors and characters, to find a different emotional timbre, to build to a different conclusion. And sometimes they were just words that couldn't be said. Rewrite or cut. In this place with these two actors, and this reality, these words just can't be said.

This growing 'character', this new layer of 'I', would emerge and take its place in the intensity of an enclosed, experimental, rehearsal environment. What interests me now is that I appear to have felt safe enough to connect where shape-changing was expected, and in some senses controlled by the artifice or boundaries of the script. I could connect without having to be entirely me. I could participate in remoulded form. If I bring my attention to the experience of connection when outside the confines of this artifice, then I realise I found refuge here from an unmanageable openness to my context, that experience of being, in Merleau-Ponty's language, 'invaded'.

I left the business of being an actor (when I was 29) for two connected reasons. I left partly because the 'who's who?' question was becoming dominant. By the time I reached 29 I really needed some grounding in 'Who is Madeline, who is she?'. Let me try that a different way. I am not saying that I took the part home with me, and became another, so therefore lost myself. I think what was happening was that I was accustomed to shape-changing; it was a way of being in the world. I somehow sensed that I was losing myself. I was excessively affected by my environment, open to its influence; a level of influencing that was unmanageable. I would find myself connecting in the moment, losing myself, overwhelmed by the intensity of the presence of others, something that went beyond anything I could control. Although of course I only know this now, as I begin to see what Rayner calls 'communicating through intermediary domains' (2004) or 'reciprocally breathing relationship of inner with outer through intermediary space' (*ibid.*). I have this glimpse, through a dogged and repeated inquiring into why? what is going on here?, and writing, writing, writing,

MS LONDON

I am singing. Gurgling in a sing-songy kind of way. Swinging down the street with a couple of pints in me. Cosy and cheery. Content. The smile of a silly evening with nice people chatting inconsequentially about the world swings with me, and I laugh out loud. Everything around me starts up in weird and interesting relief. I am heading for Leicester Square, the last tube home on the Piccadilly. I am zinging. Not surprising then, really.

I skirt the distress of the prone human form on the pavement, struck by the stuffed plastic bag used to comfort his sleeping or stupefied head. *Sainsbury's* recycle bags in more ways

that they ever imagined. I suddenly feel cold. It's December and my hands, as always, are like ice. I search for my gloves.

There's a wrapped up sort of feeling on the platform, people still slightly shocked by the winter, closed in against the perils of late night underground transport, zipped up and shut off. A single train door stops in front of me. I step up to enter and obstructing the doorway is a man in a wide-brimmed black hat and radiant blue eyes. Whirlpools. Electric. Irresistible. I smile with unconcealed, unforced pleasure, delighted, thoroughly delighted. Still zinging. I step in and he steps out.

SKATE seems to have left her mark on the carriage. On the advert for MS LONDON's Lifestyle Show, 'The Show for Women'. On the sign saying DO NOT OBSTUCT THE DOORWAY. A plain, black, rounded hand, simple and direct. The mascara-topped wide eye in the ad is suitably make-over lifeless, now decorated with a SKATE scar, prominent and black. I instinctively feel that SKATE would give MS LONDON the finger and smear her lipstick with full-tongued relish and prance delightedly through any doorway, obstructed or not. The woman on my left, an altogether different MS LONDON, comfortable and vaguely languid, starts to read a Thesaurus, starting on page 1. Looking for connections.

I look up and there, standing, in long black coat and black, black hat is the man with the bluest eyes. A Hassid. He winks at me.

A violence happens within me. A wrenching that twists my guts. The scene morphs in front of me, everything distorts. How did he get there, he got off the train, he's following me, I am a woman travelling late at night alone, I am in danger....In seconds I am no longer in love with the world, gurgling and singing. Urban paranoia sears through me. I look away, completely shaken. The woman with her thesaurus is still on Attenuate.

After the next stop I dare to look up again. He is no longer there. I stand up and obstruct the doorway, checking the next carriage for signs.

The rest of the journey passes in swiftnesses and halts, my mind racing with the rush or paralysed by the extreme strangeness I feel. I periodically double-check. I am convinced that I was seeing things. I experienced him leave the train at Leicester Square with all my senses. I know we left him behind on the platform. He moved aside for me and I for him. We slid effortlessly past one another, touched by a brief instance of pure connection.

The thesaurus gets off at Russell Square, the woman too, captivated and enthralled. A mature student perhaps, rediscovering the glories of meanings, of words, their taste and shape and perfect syllabic form. They cavort before her up the empty platform, exploding with energy like children in the snow.

The ricocheting within me begins to slow. I am alert. Two young Export drinkers are heading north, trapped in a fug of misunderstanding, flailing with the task of explaining to one another why they can't go to his or hers.

I get off at Manor House. I no longer feel at ease enough to walk the 10 minutes home past the strange quiet of Finsbury Park, closed to all but the swans on the New River, and those who squeeze through her fences. As I step down on to the platform my head swivels as if yanked by a lead and at the end of the platform stands my man in black. Present. Visible. All human.

The escalator at Manor House is a long one and moves at escalator pace. The exit to the escalator is at the front of the platform where I am now. Instead of running I step on to the escalator and stand, as instructed, to the right, bewildered.

In a flash he is by my side.

What are you doing here? Do I know you? You got off at Leicester Square. You smiled at me
Why are you following me?

We are tripping over one another, I realise I am almost screaming.

You smiled at me. I thought I knew you.
You got off at Leicester Square
I went to another carriage, with a friend. I thought I knew you. You smiled at me.
No, I say, No. What are you doing here?
I live here, he says simply, I live here.

We pass through the barrier in silence. He turns to me and asks quietly,

Do you believe in God?

No, I answer, truthfully, ...but I believe in....I struggle for the words... I believe in....connections....something bigger....

He reaches for my hand. Take off your glove, he instructs.

His hands are warm, hairy, homely. He clasps my still chilly hand in his and looks deep into my eyes.

Shalom, he says.

And in a flash he is gone, up the stairs with his black coat flapping behind him.

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I only began to understand about this edge of me-connection to outside stuff when the art-therapist I had been seeing did an experiment. I regularly came to her with stories of unsolicited contact with strangers, people in the street, on trains, anywhere really. When

with my friend Sheila, she would comment that she only ever engaged with strangers when with me.

My art-therapist asked me to stand in the middle of the room and to tell her when I could sense her as she walked around me. I was aware of her as she passed behind me, but when she stepped in front, it was as if she had walked right through me. She asked me where I felt I ended, where my edge was, and I could not see or sense it, it was so far in the distance and outside the room. I suddenly felt myself as I do when I stand at the sea's edge, as if I stretch into infinity, scary and watery and mortally afraid. I was suddenly and physically conscious of how others sense me, as if we are bodily in the same space. So they talk to me. Rayner might recognise this as a lived manifestation of us all as 'local expressions of everywhere.....coherent through the connectivity of our common space.' (2004). Simply knowing that has taken the fear away. Since that time I have concentrated on being able to control my circumference, shrink or expand my boundary. Sometimes my skin is too thin, sometimes too thick, but I know it changes. I now have a choice about with whom and where I engage. In my work, as an evaluator and as a human rights activist, this shifting boundary translates into something akin to what Kushner calls 'reconciling critical distance with real personal engagement' (2000, p.125) or finding critical distance out of the soup of personal engagement.

Working for Colombia - Bearing the hearing of so many stories of cruelty and pain

I am sitting on an uncomfortable chair in a back room of a building. The plan is to meet and talk to a large number of people from different groups in the social movement in this area. I feel a bit like a doctor in her surgery, with an overfull caseload for the day. I have a small cup of *tinto*, black coffee water that tastes sweet but not much like coffee. I know that this is just one of many I will drink today.

The first woman and her daughter tell me in quiet voices how their husband and father was taken from the house at midnight by armed men, and a hooded person who pointed him out. These were men they knew to be members of the Armed Forces, dressed in paramilitary uniforms, [a kind of moonlighting violence, I think, as if they don't get enough of it during the day-job]. When the body is found the next day, they know about it through a tip-off. He has signs of torture, his hands are tied behind his back, he has been shot though the head but only after immense suffering. They are too scared to go and collect his body. No one will have collected any evidence, and the body will probably end up in the river, and swell as it death-floats on the current. The two women are currently in hiding.

The next woman tells me a highly complicated story, but the thrust is the same. Her husband was killed in front of her and two of her kids, while she watched in silent horror, praying they wouldn't find her son hiding in the cupboard.

As the day goes on, the door swings open and shut, and more people, mainly women, with more stories of degradation and abuse tell me about their pain as they stare bleakly at the floor, or flail angry impotent arms, or talk about justice in distant voices, while resisting the urge for revenge. I nod, ask questions, feel ashamed and impotent myself, and know that

the next is waiting outside. This is all supposed to tell me something about what is happening in this region, where I have never been before. It is all, however, almost unbearably the same as in every other region.

A man tells me a terribly familiar story, or being forced from his land and home at gunpoint by state-aided paramilitaries, of arriving in a strange town, seeking help, terrified of reprisals, knowing that these men are following people round the country. This is the story of upwards of a million people, yet each one is a person, a family, a community.

Another intimates he will be joining the guerrilla, largely for revenge I think, although disguised as political belief. It doesn't surprise me, just depresses me.

As I sit and listen, I have to hold on to myself. My deal with myself is that I never allow myself the luxury of numbers and categorisation, of thinking 'oh this is another one of these'. At the same time, I have to be careful not to drown in the tears, and become so angry and touched that I cannot separate me from them. To some extent the language helps me to stay sufficiently in-touch and touched, without being overcome. **I am almost always a different shape in Spanish**, and the difference gives me breathing space.

At the end of every story, the question is a variation of the same. What are *you* going to do for us? Most people are not entirely clear why I am here, they think I am a lawyer, or a member of Amnesty International, or an aid worker with humanitarian assistance to offer. As a political lobbyist, my job is to be able to communicate their stories and their demands in a far away place, where politicians and policy-makers in the European Union are making decisions about aid budgets and political support for the Colombian political regime. It is irrelevant to their immediate concerns, and I know it. I try to explain, but I know that if you are a poor rural worker who has never really left your immediate town centre, the European Union may as well be another planet. They nod uncomfortably and I feel wholly inadequate.

In another place in Colombia on another visit, a nun who was helping a local group who had arrived in town forced to flee for their lives said to us with great force and integrity: '¿Qué van a hacer para esa gente? Vienen aquí a especular, pero no se hace nada.' What are you going to do for these people? You come here and gawp and then don't do anything. She was sick of delegations of people coming to view the situation, who then left and were never heard of again. What the people we talked to asked us was not to send them any more packets of lentils, they don't like lentils or eat them. We went and gave the local mayor a hard time for not fulfilling his responsibilities, and we got a fax machine for them from the UK Embassy so that they could tell the world when they were about to be killed. But it felt horribly like gawping.

Each visit made me think hard, not just about them, about myself, the world they live in and have made, the world we live in and have made. But in the end I knew and know that an awful lot of this was not 'my stuff'. My capacity for influence is limited, and I can do what I can do. But I can't heal their country. Only they can do that.

It is difficult for me to know how far others can understand this inside knowledge that I have about the extent of my individual-ness. What does all of this look like in my work? What does shape-changing mean here? In some ways with acting a role it is easy-ish to explain. In recent years I have worked a lot in Spanish, and the realities of working in another language have other insights to offer.

Speaking Spanish

I probably spend over 50% of my working time speaking Spanish. I learned to speak Spanish when I was 25, during one of my last acting jobs. I had always wanted to speak another language fluently, and at that precise moment I wanted to be able to read the poetry of Federico Garcia Lorca in the original. I took myself to Southern Spain and was dreaming in Spanish within three days.

The appropriation, internalisation of another language, is a bit like semi-becoming another person, like taking on a role. First there is the incomprehension, the struggling with form and structure, the woodenness, the searching for words. Then you get the words and the form but they have no inner life. They are translated words, words still coming from the original 'I' you started out with, but they feel contextually wrong. Then you get a glimmer, a kind of rush of words and ideas which have a liveliness to them, that feel whole, together, like a moving phrase in music perhaps. Then almost like stepping through into another dimension, you have become another side of yourself. Gestures and facial expressions, loudness of voice, fluency of movement alters, and your whole being has taken on a subtly different shape. You speak in and through the language; you don't just speak the language. You can even be funny.

When you come and go to a country, like I do to Colombia, rather than live in it, this process of feeling 'in' the language takes a few days. The structure and form of English has to recede, the listening is intense, and there are certain gateway phrases and words that help me to attune to the Colombian mind. Through these I rediscover my flow, my fluency, my being there.

There is often a moment in my trips to Colombia when I have been in exceptionally tiring runs of meetings, talking, listening, probing and thinking in Spanish for days. This moment is like experiencing a state of no language, what I call the abyss. No words reveal themselves, not Spanish, not English. It is as if my wiring has shorted out. I start in a Spanish construction and hit a hole, where the word I want has dropped in and through and in trying to retrieve it I bump up against the possibility of an English word. But this English word cannot be made to work; I am in my Spanish self. This English word wrecks the shape. And then there is no language. No words work. An emptiness that I have never sensed at any other time occurs, the same as when lines are forgotten in a play. It is a peculiar, almost out-of-body experience. A place where the shape has temporarily lost its definition and you can barely sense that strange Gormley figure at the centre of the quantum cloud field.

The body at work

Let's loop back to Gormley (2000), through Bohm (1987) and even to Scharmer (2004). This is primarily an embodied experience, one that is something words are poor at bringing to life. As a woman who writes and speaks, this word failure is something I find frustrating, although I am mollified by Gombrich, who in his interview with Gormley, muses that:

'Language is in statements, art is not. Language can lie. I would say that the majority of experiences are inaccessible to language, but it is astounding that some are.' (Gormley, 2000, p. 29)

Gormley always works from the body. He has mostly used himself, his own body, as the model for his work. He casts himself, creates through his body a moment in time and form. He does this because it is the only instrument he has. He believes that what his body holds in that moment is only a part of the whole field of experience, and that those who 'see' this artwork experience it bodily and as part of themselves and the whole. He says it a great deal better. What's marvellous about Gormley is that he has found a way to explain his work in words, and capture just what it is about his work that meets this embodied experience I am trying to talk about:

'Our appearance belongs to others, we live in the darkness of the body – part of all darkness but felt. The skin, on which light falls and which it renders visible, is useless for definition – but perhaps all definition is provisional; a necessary charting in our journey through uncertainty. .....My proposition is that we are part of a world constructed from the earth, in which everything is interchangeable. My hope is that the old formula of a 'subject who looks' at an object which is 'looked at' can be transmuted into us looking at ourselves. The place of my body is offered as yours and the space and actions of your body are reflected in the works, what they are made of and how they are made. Nothing is revealed that is not already there – including you.' (2000 p. 152)

This threads into my understanding of Bohm's (1987) 'implicate order', a field of enfoldment out of which all that we are and experience unfolds. A continuous field, in which all matter and energy have both particle and field, or wave properties. This is an interconnected network of quanta, in which connection can happen at great distances, or as Rayner puts it, 'natural dynamic organisation in which all local contents or features are wave-form expressions of their wider context.' (2004). It's as if Gormley's work emerges moulded out of the whole field of which I am a part.

'I think of sculpture as something coming up from under the earth, becoming as we all are earth above ground , but retaining a feeling of having been hidden and then revealed, a revealed energy still embedded in matter, and it brings that earthiness with it right back into the middle of the constructed world.' (Gormley, Learning to Think)

The connection that happens between me and a Gormley sculpture is often akin to that energy field, a kind of knowing that indeed this is part of me and I am part of it.

Gormley ***I want to start where language ends***

Gombrich *But you want in a sense to make me feel what you feel*

Gormley ***But I also want you to feel what you feel I want the works to be reflexive. So it isn't simply an embodiment of a feeling I once had ...***

Gombrich *It's not the communication.*

Gormley ***I think it is a communication, but it is a meeting of two lives. It's a meeting of the expressiveness of me, the artist, and the expressiveness of you, the viewer. And for me the charge comes from that confrontation.***

(Gormley, 2000, p. 12)

When I look at his work, my felt experience is that of a concentration in matter as a way of re-establishing connection, a use of the physicality of the body as connective tissue, the threaded connection with the world and the viewer. Gormley talks of his body as earth above ground. He feels his body as a connecting force, which he uses not to be self-referential or aggrandizing, but because it is where he lives.

> *'I can't be inside anyone else's body so it's very important I use my own.' (p.18)*
>
> *'My job in a broken world but self-conscious world is to reaffirm connection. The world and my body I must identify as one.' (p. 120)*

His is a search for intense experience made form, made sculpture, but carrying that trace embodied.

This is something I get closer to when I am in a yoga class.

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I am in a yoga class. Caroline the teacher is speaking. I am in the pose. She is speaking about the spiritual level of the pose, placing words in the air that have no instant meaning for me. I hold my body in the pose and I hold her in my body. It is as if I am connected to her by tissue, by sinew, she is another manifestation of the body, and her words make sense bodily. I hold the words in my attention, but they do not take my attention. I am inside my body and I am outside my body. My body gives up its tension.

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I have seen a number of Gormley's works, and am always astonished at the powerful intensity I feel, as if the collected energy that went into the work is shimmering there.

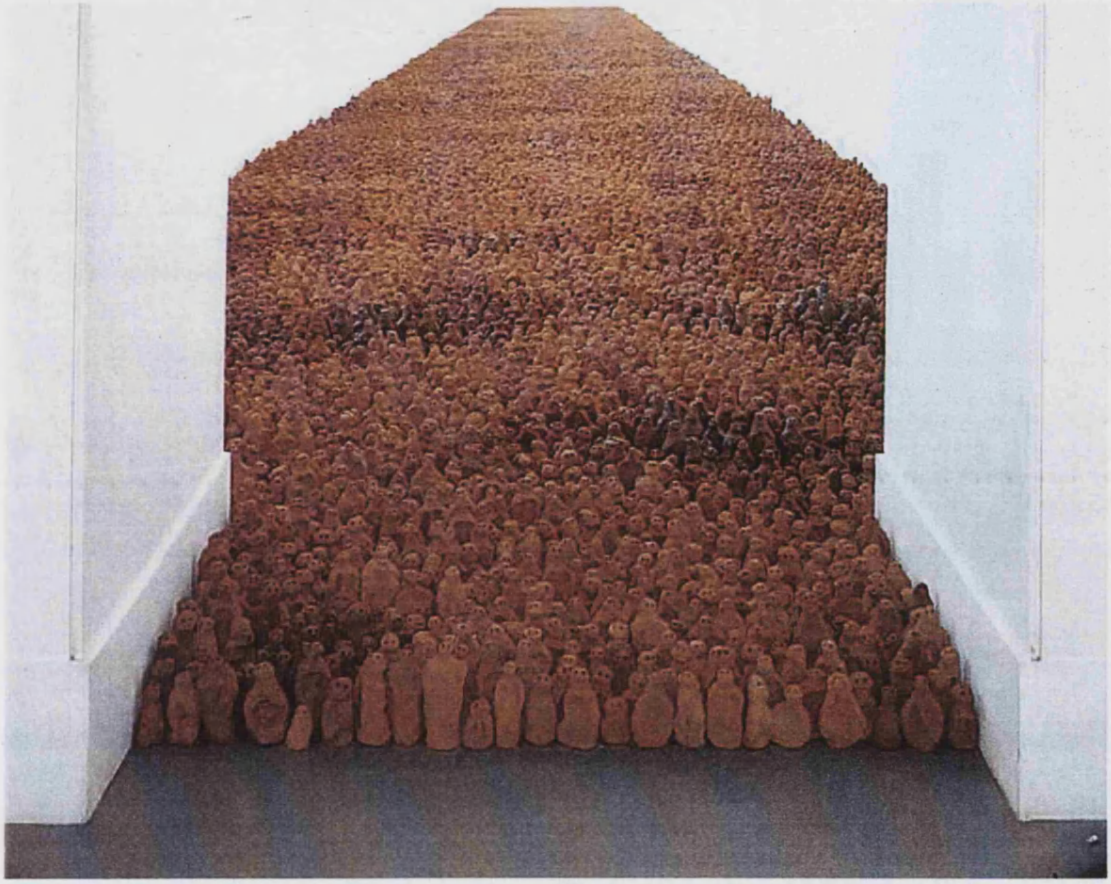
> *'I am interested in something that one could call the collective subjective. I really like the idea that if something is intensely felt by one individual that intensity can be felt even if the precise cause of the intensity is not recognised.'(ibid., 2000, pp. 18-19)*

I tend to feel the **urge to write** about my responses to Gormley's and other sculptors' work in the moment, and have begun to touch what Gormley means by this 'collective subjective' through my writing of these experiences.

> *'The subject of sculpture has to be being: what does it feel like to be alive? Set aside all ideas of representation and replace them with reflexivity. We have to allow for a heightening of awareness that links the act of perception with being itself. The perception of art is similar to that of nature. When you stand beneath a mature oak, or looking at a glacial lake, or at a mountain, there is a sense of being held in the presence of something that is greater in terms of time and more resilient in terms of space, rooted, present, and the present-ness of that perception enters into your being. I think works of art aspire to this condition of present-ness and so can endow the viewer with this heightened sense of self.' (Gormley, Learning to Think)*

I find I understand what Gormley means here when I begin indeed to be reflexive in the moment of meeting his work.

FIELD FOR THE BRITISH ISLES 1993
Terracotta Variable size: approx. 40 000 figures, each 8-26 cm tall



I saw 'Field for the British Isles' at the British Museum, before I had heard Gormley talk about this piece. The large gallery room is full of 40,000 small figures made of clay, with two hollow eyes, looking up. As the viewer you must stand at the narrow opening and look down and across them.

As stand here and look, this is how my inside reacts. I feel peculiarly disturbed. I am being seen, by thousands of eyes. I am being looked at, by thousands of eyes, in thousands of bodies, and those bodies are mute. No words can be spoken by these little thousands, as they have no mouths. I am being questioned by these thousands of individuals who all look as much the same as you and I do. All noticeably human clay, all body-shaped, all as simply formed as a child's drawing, but each one completely different. I feel I am being asked for leadership as I stand here in front of these mute hoards, in expectation. The huge multitude nature of them is as unnerving as being

surrounded by bees or an invasion of ants. They are ridiculously small, yet they provoke a kind of unspeakable fear.

When I read the accompanying information about this work, there are pictures and a description of the process of the work, of how the people of St Helen's made the figures to a simple brief, each person taking a handful of clay, making two eyeholes, and filling in space in front of them with little figures. There are photos of these figures being fired in kilns. The image of these little figures packed into kilns powerfully calls back pictures of bodies in pits in German concentration camps, of the hollow eyes of pain, and I suddenly feel myself to be a dictator, to be standing at Nuremberg, standing tall over this expectant multitude, and I feel this creepy sensation of having to do something, having to be in charge, having to be right. I feel the abdication of responsibility of each of these individuals, the offering of that responsibility to me, the tragedy of that desperation for answers, for knowing, for certainty. I smell the hideous odour of unquestioning patriotism.

There is also a surge of joy, of the knowledge that Gormley made this work with others, and that there is an emergence in that Field out there of all that expression of individual hands who moulded the figures, people who would not normally have anything to do with 'art', but who come from a historical community of glass-blowers, artisans. There is something electrifying about this collective body of experience.

Some months later, I tape and watch ArtNow, a Channel 5 documentary dedicated to Gormley. I also read his book on the work. This is what he says about Field, in conversation with the interviewer:

> *'Field while being an image of the globalised, multi-cultural democracy – it's utopian at one level, but with a twist, it presents the unborn on a parallel plane, but evidently anxious, looking for something, they're looking for us, looking for bodies to haunt, consciences to infect.'*
>
> *'Field expresses an anxiety about what kind of world are we bequeathing – it puts each of us in a position of God, we are the makers of the world, we are the people that are in charge while we are alive, of our own lives and in some way of everyone's. It takes a certain anxiety about what kind of world we are making and makes it into a collective experience, and interestingly enough a collective experience in the making, that's important, that it was generated by a lot of people coming together and being aware of what they were doing, in a new way perhaps.' (ArtNow)*
>
> *'Civilised' suggests urban culture; this is an invasion of urban culture by something to do with the remote, the marginal, the dispossessed, the unacknowledged, the fear lurking in the subconscious, the degree to which we try to live with the unknown but in a time of greater and greater mediation – we expect everything to be explained – this work refuses to be explained. It just goes on quietly asking, looking, waiting...' (Gormley, 1994, p. 72)*

This experience knots up many things. As a seriously committed activist, this work asks me to question any claim I have to rightness. It asks me to re-examine, and to regain my humility. It places me in the place of those who choose to be leaders, those whom I choose to challenge with my stories of pain. It shocks me because it is mute, and I am so determined always to speak out. It reminds me of the dangers of disconnection. It reminds me that the more you strip away the things that make them look like us, the clothes, the trappings of the human, the easier it is to make others small, mute and

dependent. I see the faces of kids living on the streets of Bogotá and think, they were once someone's best beloved, and now they are 'animals'. Except for their eyes.

The work brings forth a world, something immanent, collective, something extraordinary. What Gormley wants and what I receive are intimately connected. The meaning unfolds, from the implicate order, from the field; it carries the traces of multiple meanings within it. My body / mind is connected to these meanings, they emerge within me. This work contains the hands of all those who moulded these forms, bodies that merge in the field with other bodies of experience, yet each has its own relatively independent structure. My shape changes in this meeting, my edges expand to absorb and reinvent the meaning.

It is this quality that is immanent in all that I am and do. It is a feature of my being, and has presence in all that I do. Methodologically speaking, what I find in my connection with art, with my environment, and with others, is embodied in such a way that it demands that I pay attention to what it means, and reflect upon it through writing. It informs the way that I work, and the way I know what I know. It is a lived experience for me, and I hold it in my gaze in the way that van Manen (1997) describes when he writes about phenomenological attention.

Forming questions

In what way, how does this connect to my external way of acting through inquiring, through forming and asking questions? To return again to the early attempt at an abstract:

> My way of practising, my method, is through questions. Questions hold me apart, and give the impression that I am a part. The struggle has been to ask questions that really connect me, make me a part, and don't just hold off inquiry, keep me apart. **I loathe being asked questions about myself. This is a resistance to connection.** But **I am fascinated by and in awe of the lives of others. I love to inquire.**

My starting point can again be traced back to responses to my violated self and environment. I started my inquiry process with a subtle awareness that I had developed the art of questioning as a form of self-defence.

This is one of the first pieces of reflection I wrote:

> It is thought by some peculiar that I, who spent years working as an actress , would hate being in the spotlight. **I loathe being asked questions about myself.** For me, taking on another character was a way for me of not being seen. Of disguising myself. I was never invisible, always a person people noticed and remembered. But it was only OK if I had some kind of control over it. And allowing others to question me, to probe, to uncover me for themselves, was not OK.
>
> I am a sophisticated questioner. I encourage others to unfold themselves, I know when to press further and when to pull back, I know when to offer a scrap from my experience which fosters trust in the other that I understand, allowing them to allow me to enter further.

It is an intimate process, a wooing, a courtship, mostly driven by care and love, but mainly driven by me.

I am highly sensitised to this process and the wheel spikes and armour-plating are flipped instantly into operation if I sense a person with similar urges is trying to do the same to me. I am adept at answering questions with questions, at refocusing the attention, at diverting and diverging. Many a time I will leave an encounter with the other saying 'but I still don't quite understand what it is you do/believe/want.....' and I will smile enigmatically and know that I have avoided exposure yet again.

And I began to realise how my questioning, and much of the questioning that goes on in our society, so often takes the form of bullying.

Who are the questioners? What company do I keep? Journalists, barristers, magistrates, examiners, GPs, analysts, researchers, market researchers, detectives, interrogators, loss adjusters, benefit agencies, and many others. Including me.

Questions have a remarkable assumed power. It is assumed that the question will reveal the truth. The question is the tool of justice, of science, of objective assessment, of social engineering. It is not acceptable in the media not to answer the question. John Humphries, the controversial Today Programme presenter is famous for his bullying response to those who try. If you do not wish to answer, or you do not consider the question to be acceptable or valid, you are considered to be hiding something. So techniques are developed to avoid answering the question or to counter with another question. Techniques I am very familiar with. And these are then exposed as mere trickery or fakery to avoid 'being accountable'. (Deborah Tannen in her book, The Argument Culture, argues that we are ill served by this culture of adversarial question and answer.) Examinations of all kinds are often tests in answering-techniques, rather than tests of our knowledge.

Silence is no longer acceptable defence in the courts of law – again you must be hiding something. Yet if you must answer the question as put to you, silence is often times the only answer. The power lies squarely with the questioner, who can manipulate the question to sow doubt about the integrity or truthfulness of the respondent. If I must only answer yes or no to a question I profoundly disagree with, where do I go? – to silence. I answer only to my God was Thomas More's response, one of the more famous who wouldn't answer the question.

I recently had a drink with Joan McGregor, of Responding to Conflict, a Birmingham-based NGO. We had never met before. In the course of our conversation, she said she had a rule for herself. She doesn't ask questions to which she already knows the answer. She decided this when working with lawyers. Barristers are trained to ask only questions to which they already know the answers, as only in this way can they control the case. Others must be made to say out loud what you already know, for the record. This is also relevant to journalists. Doubt or contradiction or paradox or simple not-knowing is seen in some way as obscuring of the truth. On the other hand, those of us interested in the way human relations operate, and human connection is made, must allow ourselves and others to walk into the unknown.

I know this because I have a complicated relationship with questions, the ones I form and the ones others ask me. I have learned how to stay invisible inside my questioner's skin, to prevent access by those who would question me, at the same time as encouraging revelations, trust, intimacies. I see in the above the way questioning becomes an exercise in closing down real inquiry, and in shaping a territory of control.

Let me tell you the story of bullying in my life in a different way.

I have found my own capacity for bullying in my developed skill of questioning others and refusing others' questions. This insistence can be like interrogation. This insistence says, 'Only I have the right to ask, you must keep your questions to yourself and you must answer mine.' It is I think quite frightening for others, and has led others to be wary of me. I know that bullying is part of my self, my fabric, and my response when I was bullied young was to internalise a practice of bullying as an act of self-defence. That practice has been expressed through my questions.

While this is certainly a behavioural technique that I learned to avoid being vulnerable, another very powerful impetus has always been to know others, to understand how they tick and what drives them, to explore their lives. I am fascinated by and in awe of the lives of others. Yet as a consummate questioner I sometimes feel a sense of loss when the line of questioning dries up, a kind of emptiness because I have let the thrill of designing the questions divert me from the true purpose of witnessing, appreciating and learning from the unfolding. I have retreated behind my questioner's cloak. Increasingly I know that I have missed out, missed an opportunity to explore and exchange at a deep level, to enter the flow of dialogue or meaning-making. Increasingly I am pausing before taking evasive action, and making the decision to open myself to scrutiny.

Returning to shape-changing, this quality is often what allows me to sense the important questions to ask. It is something that is not seen, not heard, but felt. I experience it bodily. I sometimes see it as a tuning in to the field around me. The image that Gormley uses of his body being earth above ground, or that Bohm (1987) explains as a continuous field, helps me to hold a picture of immanence. Scharmer (2004) speaks of 'presencing', or 'co-presencing', a bringing of the future into being.

> *'Co-presencing: opening up to what wants to emerge and accessing a capacity of stillness that no longer separates what wants to emerge from who we are' (p. 9)*

It may be something like that too. It tends to bring questions that are immanent to the surface.

It is an embodied and unnerving way of being, for me and for others, and it is related to what I voice, what I say and am heard to say in my interaction with others. It is a capacity to mould myself to meet the essence of another, and it is not something I consciously do, or can do. It is something that simply is. It is experienced by others in distinct ways. They may say 'you have an unerring ability to put your finger right on it' (Eleanor Lohr). It can be like an arrow hitting the bull's-eye, painful or revealing. The only way I can describe it that makes sense to me is that my boundaries of self shift outwards and inwards, and I literally take on something of the other. The most obvious sign of this is how I absorb the

accents of those I talk to within seconds of meeting them, and find I have to exercise enormous strength not to talk in their voice.

This doesn't happen only if I am directly 'in touch' with another. On many occasions I feel the field of people across a room, or sense the underlying question that is around in any gathering. This often leads me to 'hear' a question that requires formation. My capacity for hearing the important questions, often difficult ones, and to speak them, is one of the reasons people employ me in their reflection and evaluation processes.

Collingwood, in his autobiography, muses on the importance of the 'questioning activity' (1939, p. 30). He is motivated by a desire to reinstate the importance of questions, rather than attending simply to the answers.

> *'A logic in which the answers are attended to and the questions neglected is a false logic.' (ibid., pp. 30-1).*

Indeed his position is that unless you know the question, you cannot decide if the answer is right. This may seem obvious, yet in a world in which the propositional form seems to have the greater validity, questioning the attention to answers, and paying attention to questions, is a way of working that feels uncommon.

Questions are at the very centre of all my professional practice. As an evaluator I see my strength in my almost intuitive ability to ask the difficult questions that are at the heart. Questions are intrinsic to the 'work of evaluation'. They are the ones to perfect. As a mediator, the questions that move the parties on are the ones to nurture. They are inviting, opening, refreshing questions. They incorporate a challenge to see things from another perspective.

Collingwood suggests that giving the questioning activity primacy is to wake up 'the Socrates within us'. (*ibid.*, p.35). In his logic of question and answer, the question must arise, ie be one that in some way makes itself known, and each answer must be right for the question.

> *'By 'right' I do not mean 'true'. The 'right' answer to a question is the answer which enables us to get on with the process of questioning and answering.' (ibid., p.37)*

This kind of question-forming allows the possibility that there is no 'one' answer to a question, indeed there may be several 'right' answers, if the question is posed in such a way to be inquiring, not simply self-affirming.

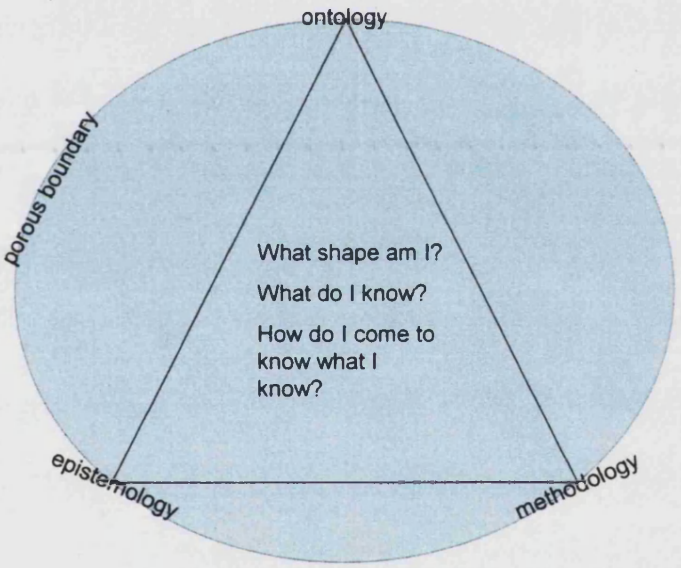
This sits right at the heart of the reflective paradigm, as I understand it. It has an underlying assumption of asking questions rather than seeking firm answers, and of the kind of messy complexity that Kelly captured so beautifully in the quote I use on p. 29. Winter *et al.* suggest that:

> *'to renew and invigorate our thinking, we need to recollect our sense of uncertainty, of unresolved and complex dilemmas. Although our questions can be answered, these answers are always only provisional and temporary. Our current answers are themselves open to new questions.' (Winter et al., 1999, p. 110)*

This sense of questions arising, and of being giving due prominence, is there in Bohm's (1987) notion that a question emerges from a field. For me a question's worth, and indeed its power, is in its ability to unfold that which is enfolded, to draw out the explicate from the implicate. I have this sense that a question is tempted into being by something implicate, a rubbing or a friction that forces the question to be asked, the question already holding something within it that leads to further explication. A question like this generates further inquiry, where responses made allow us indeed to 'get on with' asking and responding to further questions.

What does it mean?

I have spent a long time thinking about and writing myself into a place where I can sensibly talk about ontology, epistemology and methodology. For me they interrelate in ways that make it difficult to separate them out. As is becoming clearer I hope as we move along, I have a way of seeing that integrates, rather than separates. This doesn't mean that I cannot be analytical. It just means that the process of analysis eventually leads to disintegration for me, rather than integration



I consider this inquiring 'I' to be connected in mind and body ways to the contextual fabric, and am helped by Rayner's understanding that the extent of individuality and connectedness changes depending on that context. My intention is that you have grasped a sense of 'the dynamic relation between inner and outer space, figure and ground, how each reciprocally breathes space into and out from and so relates to the other.' (Rayner, 2004)

This self-inquiry process, a process of inquiring into the extent of that self, has enabled me to write reflectively on the embodied nature of that connection, and revealed to me how my love of questions seems to frighten and appeal in equal measure. This reflective stance hopefully carries in it

> *'..[t]he voice which presents the thinking of a writer who is exploring, questioning, and thus – above all – learning. It emphasises, above all, drawing upon the resources for thinking which we have acquired from our prior experience, over a period of time.' (Winter et al., 1999, p. 110)*

My early experiences I think were born to some extent out of that fear of my inquiring, my ability to penetrate the other. I think, in some way, that my innate ability to know something of another has produced a fear in those I have come across, and most especially frightened the kids who led the charge to close me down. These fearful responses from others have led me to adapt my curious mind into a defence mechanism against others attack. I have resisted, prevented even, the very connection I have been seeking, by using questions to avert the gaze of others. I have tended to steer clear of those who want to know more, have more knowledge, of me. As such my own accounting for myself has been largely to myself. My questions have been used on me, just as they have on others. I realise that this is a self-defeating practice; it serves me ill in my search for connection.

Yet my shape-changing allows me to expand myself to meet others. It is this ability to shape-change, to in some way embody the other, that despite all allows me to maintain an open heart, to be an attractant to others, and in some way to know the essence of another. It is this that is expressed through the kinds of encounters I have with strangers. I also know that those attracted to me enjoy the attention I give them through my questions. My inquiries are one way I 'get in' to another's world.

Finally I am esteemed professionally because of my courage to ask the questions that tend not to get asked. I will tend to search out the question to which what we construct is a response. I am with Collingwood (1939). My belief is that we must pay more attention to the nature of our questions.

Given that I work in professional contexts in which questions are essential, my inquiry has taken me deep into my professional practice. Episode One, the story of the Action Research Project on international networks and evaluation, will give hopefully give you some idea of how that practice has developed and what I have learned.

But first...

Writing Interlude Two

'Human science research as writing is an original activity.' (van Manen, 1997, p. 173)

'New forms of presentation need to be explored. I hope that they will be both more playful and more rigorous than established academic models, weaving between related aspects of inquiry lightly, giving the personal and political equal weight alongside the intellectual and public-world faces of research.' (Marshall, 1992, pp. 288-9)

I feel like I have spent a lot of time over the last year searching for a form of representation for this research that does the job. In the early days I played around with the possibility of a web-page format, allowing the story to unfold through hyperlinks. Yet the text based requirements of a doctoral thesis make this an impossibility. As you will see I was deeply immersed in reading Fritjof Capra's (1996) 'The Web of Life' during that time. He tries to get over the limitations of the textual book by extensive use of linked footnotes, determined not to be bound by the demands of the linear form. Yet as a reader this strategy didn't really work for me.

I was looking for a way to unfold a story of the Action Research Project on Evaluation in International Networks which gave you, the reader, access into the dirtier, more difficult and opaque world of actually doing a piece of collaborative research. The project already has a number of outputs, the most obvious being Church *et al.* (2003), but I know that the report is largely devoid of the personal, the self-reflective, and the humans who made it happen.

I want to fill in that gap. One reason is because I chose to do an action research doctorate, and I agree with Marshall (1992, 1995, 2001) in that any action research degree must acknowledge and pay attention to the way the individual doing the research acts on and influences the process. The other is because I, like Kushner (2000), wish to put the personal back into evaluation. He advocates doing evaluation of publicly-funded programmes through the lens of those who are touched by such programmes. This means stepping away from programme logic, a logic that requires us to hold people to account for the success of public policy. It means holding public policy to account for its ability to realise the potential and meet the aspirations of those who are affected by it.

I was also looking for a way of bringing myself and my work to life. I want the reader to get inside the process, to feel the energy of people working to work things out. I want to bring the lived experience closer. Yet curiously I find that the ever-present 'I' in many of the self-inquiry research accounts leave me further away from vicariously living that experience. I find myself more detached from than engaged with. My reflection on the story about my bullying experiences had given me a certain kind of insight into how writing about my self, in the third person, somehow brought the experience more vividly to light.

It was again while writing one day that I started to play around with the form of a shooting script for a film. I was interviewing myself, asking myself questions, and in writing it up it became transformed into one of those slightly self-important, slightly pompous South Bank show profiles. Since then, I have found a lightness creep into the writing inquiring process, something that feels like it responds to Marshall's invitation to create a form of presentation that is both 'more playful and more rigorous than established academic

models, weaving between related aspects of inquiry lightly, giving the personal and political equal weight alongside the intellectual and public-world faces of research,' (1992, pp. 288-9). It is not so odd for me to choose to work with the idea of a script, as it is a textual form I understand, that I know how to read and work with, given my years as an actress. It also, in an important way, connects me back into an artistic world that had great influence on me in my younger years, and has shaped so much of who I am.

So, before we plunge into Episode One, let me outline a few of the important reasons why I have found the script form creative and liberating.

A script enables me as a writer and performer to bring people more completely to life within the confines of text, and allows me to stand outside of myself, to present myself, and to illuminate what my own learning process has been in these five years.

The fictionalised form of a script has several different layers. It works on a significantly different level to the kind of cognitive engagement demanded of scholarly work. Yet it retains the emphasis on the word, in a way that is necessary in a doctoral thesis. It is a way of constructing many layers of a story that may shift across time-frames and places. The shifting between locations, and between past, present, future, allow a writer to play with notions of linearity, circularity, and develop connections between seemingly unconnected events, without reams of wordage. A script-writer can play with visual images, turn posters into video screens, import faces, and choose to provide information through visual metaphors, stage directions, information in capitals, and sound effects, to give the reader texture, affect other senses, and provide vision through words. Yet it remains resolutely linear in its presentation, and as such becomes a useful device to bring life and colour into this determinedly fixed medium of starting reading at the beginning and ending at the end.

People come to life on the page. You can hear the way they talk, the way they explain or fudge what they know; you gain a sense of the themes that run through their lives, their blindness and perceptiveness, their subtle repeating patterns. Most of all you begin to connect to them.

In her classes in script development for the Script Factory, my friend Marilyn Milgrom highlights the importance of character:

> *Successful and favourite films are governed by our investment in a character within them. That character has become a person to us and we care about what happens to them. In making them a person, the writer has made characters believable, meaning that there is a consistency of action, speech and re-action that we recognise. In order to achieve this the writer must invest an enormous amount of thought in every character, most of which will not actually be written into the script. But the thinking must still be done.*
>
> *The key way in which we do this is by examining motivation. We instinctively want to know why someone behaves or acts or speaks in a certain way. We are not comfortable with not knowing why people do things. (personal communication, 2004)*

A script reveals sub-text without needing to be 'explanatory'. It is a way of helping you the reader to 'enter' (be a part of) and yet see at a distance (be apart from) the person. In my struggle to bring my research process to you in living, rather than dissected form, I found again and again that 'writing myself' works when I write myself in by standing apart

from it, it allows me to circumvent the kind of confessional reflexiveness that I have found so easily comes when writing from the 'I'.

This 'recognisable character', who the reader 'understands' and even empathises with, is what I think is needed in order to develop the essential communicative space between me and you. That doesn't mean I cannot be surprising, just that at some point you need to know something about the motivation, the 'why?' of it all, in order for it to comprehensible to you, and for you to decide for yourself on its integrity and authenticity.

It is in itself a reflective act. In scripting myself here, I am also making sense of the why of it all for my self, the process of writing in itself is an authentic act of sense-making. This is an autobiographical script to a large extent. The way I tell you the story is the product of an act of reflection on, and absorption of, the important images and themes, and the instances that 'show' those themes and images. The very writing of the script is an act of reflection. Moments of insight happen during the writing, learning moments, moments of perceptive clarity.

In the seeking of form I have sought to place myself in the text, to be seen in the text as a voice, a body, a person, a character. And the very form of a script creates distance, moves the 'I' of me into a third person, a 'someone' with whom to engage. It is a shape-changing, stretching exercise, where I am liberated from the confines of what I think I know of myself, and allowed to be another, a textual and created me.

I begin to 'characterise' myself for the reader, to 'account' for myself through a creative act of 'fictionalising' myself. The intention is for me to be able to 'see' me at a greater distance, be both a part of me and apart from me, and for you the reader from your position of being apart from me, to enter me, to in some sense to become a part of me, as you would with a character in a film or a book.

It is an act of creation, of transformation. In writing the script, I attempt to recreate experiences for you and for me, and in the act they are creatively transformed and reveal something new. So in my scripting of this, I am recreating something, and that very act of re-creating is reflective and communicative. In my writing in this form I ask myself 'How do I tell you (present to), the reader, the story of what I think I know, (the experiential made conscious), in a way that shows you the experiential, and contextualises it, with an intention for you to experience and know it in a different way?' And in asking that question I find my processes reveal themselves to me. Accounting for my self here generates creative knowledge.

Creative writing has power in the act of accounting for my self. I am beginning to see that if **I choose to account for myself**, to tell others about me, creative power is released. The very act of taking that step, to respond and not evade, releases creative energy. It was in the writing of this account that I found myself beginning to understand that the key moments in this research, the ones that advanced our thinking considerably, happened when I chose to respond to others' questions. **It was in choosing to make meaning with others, that creative power was released.** This may be some of what I mean when I talk of connection. Connection exists when something is running through, energy, potency.

As such I believe I indeed *make* knowledge (Marshall, 1995, p. 25), given that knowledge is 'not a thing, nor reducible to things' (Senge & Scharmer, 2001, p. 247). I experience it as described by Senge & Scharmer:

> *'an intensely human, messy process of imagination, invention and learning from mistakes, embedded in a web of human relationships.' (p. 247).*

The act of writing, committing to paper, to text, has been an act of faith in the power of writing to reveal in some mysterious way a question, then a response, a further question and response, and through that process create space for a more detailed, nuanced, and complex picture of myself in practice to emerge. This is not writing up knowledge, this is knowledge created by writing, and one which allows possibility to emerge.

> *'The realm of art is above all the realm of freedom and exploration, and it is the very elusiveness and ambiguity of art which means that even in a society where most of us experience alienation and oppression of one sort or another, where freedom for direct action is severely constrained, and where limiting ideologies are endlessly thrust upon us, the work of art can continue to express the spirit of independent critical inquiry, through the aesthetic shaping of the possibilities of our lives.' (Winter et al., 1999, p. 220)*

So, Episode One tells you how three people, friends first and colleagues second, took advantage of an opportunity for a small grant to allow us to research something we had a hunch about, and which was inspiring. It is a story about evolving practice, out of a dissatisfaction leading to a question. It's about collective and individual meaning making, using practice and mind and reading and thinking and conversing and writing. It is also a story about **my influence and work**, and **how being connected to the influence and work of others is creative and energising** for us all.

Part One is a story of the small revelations, the processes, the relationships and the conversations that emerged and coalesced and were reflected upon which came to make Church, M. *et al.* (2003) *Participation, Relationships and Dynamic Change: New thinking on evaluating the work of international networks Working Paper 121* DPU, UCL.

Part Two shows just how much we have still to do to understand how completely networks alter the paradigm we have been working in. This shows me engaging with the ideas of Capra (1996; 2003) and Maturana & Varela (1998) and wrestling with the significance of network-organising for our evaluation practice. This raises lots of further questions to inquire into.

Part Three is in some sense a validation of the guiding idea of the project, which was to do something useful that can be used by those working with the complexity of networks and networking. It is also a validation of my own more personal ambition: to inspire others to think more creatively about networks and evaluation. It brings into this document the influence this work has had across what appears to be a random selection of areas and parts of the world. It shows how the work continues to link outwards and inwards, to others in wider fields of action and practice and back to me, showing how it has organic life beyond its short formal time in the making.

EPISODE ONE:
PARTICIPATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND DYNAMIC CHANGE

PART ONE

SCENE ONE: BAR, LOW MUSIC PLAYING, WOMAN, MADELINE CHURCH, IN JEANS AND A RED LEATHER JACKET, IS PERCHED ON A HIGH STOOL AT THE BAR, DRINKING A PINT OF GUINNESS. SHE IS IN HER EARLY FORTIES, SHORT BOBBED HAIR, AND STRIKING JAW. SHE IS ANSWERING QUESTIONS FROM SOMEONE OFF CAMERA. A MICROPHONE IS JUST IN SHOT.

MADELINE: The action research project? Oh lord....What was the process like? If you read my book [publication forthcoming] I have tried to describe the way in which this process unfolded. It all started over a glass of wine, inevitably, I was at dinner at a friends and another friend, Claudy Vouhé, then working for the Development Planning Unit at UCL, asked me what I was doing, and I began to tell her that I was working for a small network on Colombia (all the big UK aid agencies and human rights groups) doing political lobbying work, and coordinating positions between the agencies. She has worked much in Africa and Latin America, so we half chatted in Spanish, drank more wine, ate more food. I then started banging on about networks and evaluation and what I thought I was doing my PhD about. I recall being fired up, waving my arms around a lot, as I do. Talking about how there is no methodology for doing evaluation of networks that do political change work, or at least any methodology that makes sense, and how much we needed it if we weren't going to get 'evaluated' by people who didn't know what they were doing, and drinking more wine, and laughing about my opinionated burbling.

SHE SWALLOWS HER GUINNESS

MADELINE - She called me a few days later, and asked me what did I think about putting together a proposal for some small grant money for the evaluation thing. Her department had just told her they needed to get more research grants. She admitted she couldn't really remember what I was on about, but the deadline was really soon and she was sure it was in the right area. I then talked to Mark Bitel, my mate from Partners in Evaluation (we had been trying to find some way of working together for a long time) and we were going to be in Edinburgh together for the UK Evaluation Society conference, so we grabbed an hour over lunch. I wrote the 'what for' kind of bits, Mark wrote the evaluation bits, and we sent it to Claudy and she did some background reading, and wrote the 'how it fits into the field' bits. It all took a week I think.

Of course I wasn't expecting we would get the money, I guess you can tell that by the rather casual way I describe putting the proposal together, I think I wasn't at all convinced that they would be convinced. Although looking at the proposal now, it looks convincing enough.

SHE WHISKS A BLUE FOLDER OFF THE BAR, AND HANDS IT TO THE INTERVIEWER OFF SCREEN

THE PROPOSAL
Building Evaluation into the Praxis of Externally-Funded Networks: A Model for Increased Participation and Effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

According to a recent publication by Karl (1999) [1], networks started to emerge in the 1960s when individuals wanted to work on issues or campaigns. Without established structures, they were compelled to form their own linkages in order to co-ordinate action, to lobby, to "network". The last ten years have seen a staggering increase in the number of networks operating in the field of development. As a result of the recognised (or assumed?) value of networks, more are now externally funded by donor organisations. As networks grow and make use of external resources, the need to ensure their accountability and effectiveness becomes more pressing.

The range of issues development networks deal with is vast and covers most of the key themes and concerns on the agenda of decision-makers and planners in international organisations, governments and NGOs in the South and the North. There are thematic networks dealing with housing (eg. The Asian Coalition of Housing Rights), water and sanitation (eg. CiudadAgua in Latin America), environment (eg. Local Agenda 21 Communities Networks) and conflict prevention and resolution (eg. CODEP), to name but a few.

Starkey defines a network as 'any group of individuals or organizations who, on a voluntary basis, exchange information or undertake joint activities and who organize themselves in such a way that their individual autonomy remains intact"[2]. The overarching objective of networks is to share information with a view to exchanging learning, avoiding duplication, pooling resources and facilitating advocacy, or, as Karl puts it, to "influence the complex and global social, economic and political forces that shape people's life and society".

Networks pose particular challenges for evaluation. Objectives and procedures are often not clearly articulated, while limited resources mean that active networks are often too busy to devote time to reflection. Formal authority and power may be held by those with access to greater resources, thus increasing chances of power imbalances. As a result changes may be harder to implement than in a single organisation because decision-making power is often less clearly allocated.

Given the specific characteristics of networks outlined above it is often considered that the effectiveness of networks cannot be meaningfully evaluated. What is certain is that evaluation should ultimately be useful to and practical for the networks themselves, and those supporting them. This research project thus aims to assess the problems common to evaluations in externally funded networks, paying specific attention to issues such as internal conflict resolution, accountability and transparency in the use of power and resources, democratisation and equity in participation. Through participatory methods, it aims to develop a model for evaluation of use to network managers, funders and members. The research is designed as a pilot project with a view to large-scale comparative research at a future date.

POLICY RELEVANCE

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[1] Karl, M: Measuring the Immeasurable: Planning, monitoring and evaluation of networks, Novib (The Hague) and Women's Feature Series (New Delhi), 1999.
[2] Starkey, P: Networking for development, IFRTD, 1997

Contribution to DFID's objectives

Networks in the development context often have as their central objectives the sharing of experiences, and the development of partnerships for change. Such aims match DfID objectives of sharing skills and experience, and of building genuine and effective partnerships. It is important that such partnerships are accountable, transparent and based on values of equality and participation. This research will support DfID objectives by developing appropriate evaluation methodology and practice in what is a rapidly-growing area of investment. The research will 1) enhance current knowledge of the challenges and obstacles to evaluation in networks; and 2) develop a participatory evaluation methodology that is tailored to the needs of networks wishing to evaluate their work.

Practical and theoretical benefits

Practically, the research will provide in-depth information on if and how networks are evaluated and how useful those evaluations are or have been. It will also develop a model of evaluation to be tested in practice with a view to wider replicability. This will be of benefit to those networks and funders or prospective funders of networks by providing a framework for accountability, transparency and control of resources.

The literature on networks, while extensive, is of relatively recent origin and reveals the limited extent of our understanding of the problems networks experience in undertaking evaluations. In this context, the research will enhance existing theoretical knowledge and debate on approaches to, and the problems of, evaluation.

Potential users

The principle potential users of the research will be those managing, participating in and funding networks. Those managing a network will have a practical model that can be employed in the regular praxis of the network; members of networks will be able to use the model to ensure participation and accountability; and external funders will find it useful in making proper use of resources.

In addition, it is envisaged that the research will be of practical and theoretical use to evaluators, trainers and the academic community concerned with evaluation.

Plans to link up with the users

During the research itself, the project will involve at least one network and its members in all stages of developing the evaluation model. A consultation and feedback stage will also ensure that those participating in the research have the opportunity to comment on the findings.

The research findings will be disseminated in a variety of formats including project reports, conference papers, journal and newsletter articles. The research, in addition to using electronic (such as ID21) and paper means of dissemination, will also aim to use networks themselves as a dissemination vehicle.

RESEARCH PLANS

Research aims

- To enhance the knowledge and understanding of how evaluation in networks is put to use and contributes to better practice;
- To understand the practical challenges and obstacles experienced by a functioning network attempting to evaluate its own work and use the learning acquired to improve practice;
- To develop a model for evaluation of networks that is practical and useful to network members, managers and funders.

Research questions

- What are the different ways in which networks evaluate their work, if any?
- How useful have evaluation initiatives been to date for those networks that have undertaken them ?
- What are the particular challenges posed by evaluation in a network project?
- What kind of evaluation model could be developed to meet such challenges?
- What methodology is most appropriate to use when researching networks?

Methodology

The research will adopt a participatory action-research approach. Participatory action research aims to integrate research and action and as such is considered appropriate to the goals of the research, which is to increase participation and effectiveness through an iterative practice of action-evaluation-action. It also aims to solve practical problems through the involvement of practioners, placing particular importance on popular knowledge and seeks to contribute to shifts in the balance of power in favour of poor and marginalised groups. It is underpinned by a commitment to democratic values.

The evaluation model will be developed with the full participation of the pilot network in an iterative process. This will promote ownership of the model and increase the likelihood that the network will use any evaluation results generated. Such an approach will draw on participatory monitoring and evaluation methods, and the work of Michael Quinn Patton (Utilization-focused Evaluation). Other practical conflict resolution theories such as mediation would be drawn upon to work through issues of power and decision-making.

Methods

Phase One (Months 1 and 2): will involve a literature review of evaluations done of/with externally funded networks. Will include peer review, published and grey literature. This phase will also review the theoretical material relevant to the research.

Phase Two (Months 3 and 4): the research will then aim to gain an overview of networks' attitudes to evaluation, how useful evaluations have been to networks who have undertaken them and if the evaluations have delivered in terms of improving practice. Different approaches will be used, including structured and open-ended interviews by email and telephone, and attendance at a network meeting (costs have been budgeted for a trip to Brussels where many EU-funded networks are based). In Phase Two a significant number of externally funded networks who have undertaken evaluations will be involved, and in addition, networks who have not yet undertaken evaluations will also be included in the research to understand why they have have not conducted the exercise, what they would seek to gain from an evaluation, and how they would go about it.

Phase Three (Months 5 to 11): will involve producing a short document outlining the results of Phases One and Two and highlighting the challenges and obstacles that networks themselves consider to be most important in making evaluation practical and useful. A model will be proposed that will then be put into practice in partnership with a network that has been identified during Phase Two. This will be an iterative process and the process itself will be documented as an important part of the research. The Network for Conflict, Development and Peace (CODEP) has expressed an interest in being involved.

Phase Four (Months 12 and 13): will involve the production and dissemination of the final outputs.

Research team

Claudy Vouhé – DPU Project Manager

Academic Qualifications
MA: International Marketing, Napier University, Edinburgh
BA: Latin American Studies, Poitiers University, France

Development Experience

3 years as DPU full-time Lecturer, Consultant and Trainer on gender policy and planning and development issues; Editor of DPUNEWS (since 1997)
Recent consultations with the ILO, the Swiss Development Cooperation, the Government of Tunisia, the South African Commission on Gender Equality (DfID funded); and NGOs in Namibia and Chile.

5 years in Namibia as Unicef Consultant "Small Businesses for Women" (1993 – 1996) and as adviser to the Ministry of Education, National Literacy Programme, Namibia (1992 – 1993). Work included research, advice and training, with extensive use of PRA and other participatory research and planning methodologies.

Networking, Communication and Advocacy
3 years with private Community development/employment Consultants firm CEI Ltd, (Edinburgh/Brussels) as a Consultant and Communication Co-ordinator for EC Programme on Long-term unemployment (1989 – 1992).

Reports/Publications

"Men and Masculinities in motion" in IDS Bulletin, with Caren Levy and Nadia Taher (forthcoming 2000); "Guía para la planificación local con las mujeres y los hombres", with Marisol Saborido, Chile (1999); Monitoring and Gender in Four Bi-lateral Aid Organisations, Report presented to the Royal Tropical Institute for DGVIII, EU (1998); "Guidelines to assist income-generating projects"; "Business skills for income-generating projects" and "Methodology to assess capacity building of income-generating projects', with A. v Diesen, UNICEF Namibia (1995-1996); 1996 Income-generating Projects for Women:Evaluation of UNICEF project 1993-1996, Namibia

Madeline Church – Research Associate

Academic Qualifications

Phd Student in Participatory evaluation at Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice, University of Bath
MA: Area Studies Latin America – University of London
BA: European Studies Spanish – University of London

Network Co-ordinator
Three years as Co-ordinator for ABColombia Group, a network of seven UK-based agencies working on displacement in Colombia [CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB, Amnesty International, PBI-Colombia Project, SCIAF, SCFUK] – since 1997

Evaluator
Evaluation consultancy to IA, Alternatives to Violence Project, CIIR, and Oficina Internacional de Derechos Humanos – Acción Colombia.

Mediation and Conflict Resolution Experience
Lead Facilitator for Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in UK prisons – since 1995
AVP 2000 Conference Convenor
Mediator for Wycombe Mediation Service - since 1998
International Alert's (IA) Latin America Officer – 1995-1997
IA Training and Resource Development Team - 1997

Reports/Publications
Bitel *et al.*: AVP as an agent of Change: the pilot evaluation of the Alternatives to Violence Project in three British Prisons, unpublished report for AVP Britain: 1998
Church, M: Assessment of AVP at HMP Cookham Wood, Stage 1,2 & 3, 1995 -7
Church, M: Disappearance, denial, resistance: women in the face of 'la violencia'. Unpublished MA Disseration, 1994 ILAS

Mark Bitel – Evaluation Consultant

Academic Qualifications
MA Sociology - State University of New York, 1991
M Professional Studies (Counselling & Ethics) - New York Theological Seminary, 1992
MSc Research and Evaluation - Institute of Health Service Research, Luton, 1997
BSc (Hons) Psychology - University of Plymouth, 1985

Professional experience
Independent Evaluation Consultant with over 5 years experience in conducting evaluations across a wide variety of human service programmes and effectiveness of NGOs in the UK and overseas. Recent clients include London Borough of Lewisham Youth Services, Black Voluntary Sector Directors Network, Konfliktradene I Oslo.

Publications include:
Mediation in a south London school" (with D. Rolls), in Mediation in practice, M. Liebmann (ed.) London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000.

Measuring Impact: a guide to monitoring and evaluation. London: Charities Evaluation Services, 1999.
A tale of two cities: the evaluation of Jobroute and Workroute. London: Tomorrow's People, 1998

Developing a strategy for HIV prevention in the African Communities in the UK (with other co-authors), London: Department of Health, 1997.

Educating Nurses: a review of post-registration HIV education and training in London, London: The HIV Project, 1996.

Professional memberships
UK Evaluation Society (currently Honorary Secretary)
Mediation UK (currently Executive Committee member)

MADELINE TAKES BACK THE FOLDER WITH A NOD

MADELINE - I was of course working at the time for the ABColombia Group, coordinating the joint policy and advocacy work on Colombia, lobbying politicians, writing submissions to UN commissions, building relationships across Europe, the US, and of course travelling to Colombia to see the horrors for myself.

FADE IN A SATELLITE MAP OF COLOMBIA, WHICH THEN ZOOMS DOWN TO APARTADO, NORTH WEST COLOMBIA

SCENE TWO: MADELINE IS SITTING IN A SMALL OFFICE IN COLOMBIA, SWEATING, CEILING FAN WHIRRING OVERHEAD. SHE IS WITH A SMALL GROUP OF RURAL WORKERS AND A NUN, CHATTING, LAUGHING.

ON THE WALL IS A POSTER ANNOUNCING A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR A LOCAL MASSACRE IN WHICH 40 PEOPLE WERE CHOPPED INTO BITS BY ARMY-BACKED PARAMILITARIES. THE ATMOSPHERE IS TROPICAL, TENSE, DANGEROUS.

SHE GETS UP WITH HER COFFEE AND GOES TO A COMPUTER ON A DESK IN THE CORNER. SHE TYPES, WAITS, AND TYPES AGAIN. SHE BEGINS TO READ HER EMAIL, OCCASIONALLY LAUGHING AND ENGAGING IN SPANISH WITH THE CONVERSATION BEHIND HER.

SHE STOPS LAUGHING SUDDENLY AND PUTS HER HEAD IN HER HANDS. SHE REACHES FOR HER COFFEE AND PACKET OF CIGARETTES, LIGHTS ONE, GOES TO THE DOOR TO BLOW THE SMOKE OUT OF THE ROOM. SHE RE-READS THE EMAIL. THERE IS A LONG PAUSE AS TEARS WELL IN HER EYES. THEN SHE CLICKS ON ANOTHER. THIS TIME SHE LAUGHS IN DISBELIEF

MADELINE VO - I remember that day very clearly. Sister Maria had come to meet me, with a group of survivors from the massacre. They had told me a very grim tale, and despite being used to hearing such terrible and brutalising stories, I had sat and listened to the whispered accounts, with my usual combination of impotence, sadness, and compassion. We finished the meeting, passed round coffee and as we relaxed and started to tell each other more uplifting stories, I asked to use the internet connection. There were two emails. One telling me George had been killed in a car crash on his way back from the USA (he'd come home a day earlier than Diane and fallen asleep at the wheel of the rented car). I was suddenly moved to tears. The other said that we had

been awarded the grant money for the networks and evaluation project, and we had to start in August.

Context here is really important, not just anecdotally interesting. At the time the grant was awarded, as I said, I was working part-time for the ABColombia Group, a small network of UK and Irish aid agencies working in Colombia. I visited two or three times a year, often undertaking a gruelling schedule of travelling and listening to stories. I then had to translate that into easily understandable political analysis for a broad readership (for an example see Appendix V, Colombia Forum, Issue 22), policy level argumentation, submissions to Commissions, feed it into round-table meetings with Ministers, and not lose the heart of the people in the process.

My personal commitment was always to try and find a way to encourage civil servants and politicians in Westminster and Brussels to see justice and human rights as the fount of real security, and to illuminate the stupidity of spending aid money on increasing a police force that was corrupt, unable to collect evidence, faced with a justice system carrying a 95% + impunity rate. I wanted them to redefine their ideas of corruption, to move on from their obsession with bribery in business and see how the normal practice of democracy in Colombia - vote-buying and assassination of political opponents - is the real corrupting force in the body-politic. I wanted them to stop taking the easy route, the military route, the more-guns and bombs route, the pay-people-to-inform route. I wanted them to see how corrupting of the social fabric that was and how dangerous in the long-term. I needed to be able to **shift from one shape to another** depending on my environment, and to combine the passions of an activist with the hard-headed clarity of a lobbyist, while holding on to my own capacity to be moved, both emotionally by peoples' stories and rationally, by more convincing arguments or ideas.

Secretly I wanted to talk about the power of love.

TABLEAU: PASSION, REASON, LOVE

THE ACTIVIST
Do you have any idea how angry, depressed, dispossessed and impotent I feel? And I don't even live there. Justice, a way out of poverty and illness, access to resources, all these are reasonable requests, why is it so hard for you to listen, pay attention, give it the commitment it requires, and not slavishly follow in the footsteps of the USA bullying its way around the world, spraying poor peasants in its war on drugs that is so badly misconceived, and ignoring its snorting and smoking backyard?

THE LOBBYIST
What we think is that a comprehensive and coherent policy on human rights, development and justice could have lasting results if it is just coupled with an attention to measurable steps and progress reports.

THE HUMAN
I believe in the transformative power of love
We have lost the will to live once we lose the power of love

CUT BACK TO THE BAR, AND THE INTERVIEW

MADELINE IS NOW ROLLING A CIGARETTE, AND LIGHTS IT AS SHE TALKS

MADELINE - I had to speak the language of the rural poor, the language of the aid agencies, and the language of politicians all at once. I also had to work with a wide spread of networked institutions and individuals across Europe and the USA to build common positions to increase our influence. I had to be Spanish-speaking, abierta, accessible, con conocimiento de la realidad rural, understanding of rural reality, committed to doing something, con cojones. I had to sound authoritative, be persistent, creative, and understanding of the complexities of political action or inaction. I had to retain my passion for justice and love in the face of ugly realities and weakness and political bullshit.

I was also in my second year at CARPP, and still searching for a research agenda. This project would give structure to my research and money to do it. I had thought I would give up my ABColombia job if the money came through.

Once it did, I agonised for weeks about what to do. I think now I can see that there was no way I could have given up my job. I had to be in networks, of relationships, meaning, doing something good, trying to change things, in order to be able to do this Action Research project. I somehow couldn't imagine the project working if I wasn't, still, working, still being touched to act.

Invitation to participate

MAKING EVALUATION REAL AND USEFUL FOR NETWORKS
An Action Research Project Funded By Department For International Development (DfID)

This project seeks to understand the way externally-funded networks evaluate their work, the challenges and obstacles that we face, what stops us undertaking evaluative exercises, and how/if we put the results of those exercises to use. We are looking to move the methodological debate forward and fill in some of the gaps that exist when it comes to the difficult job of evaluating our work.

I am not only part of the research team, but also a network co-ordinator, and it is my own experience in that work that led me to propose this project. We want it to have real practical benefits for network co-ordinators, members and funders. As part of the work, we would like to establish an Action Research Group to run the length of the project, made up of those who are paid to co-ordinate networks. The idea is to ensure that we are actually responding to the issues practitioners come up against when faced with the challenge of evaluation.

If you are a network co-ordinator and interested in attending a preparatory meeting of the Action Research Group, make sure you answer the last question and we will send you further details. The first meeting of the Group will take place on the afternoon of 19th September 2000 in London.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Madeline Church

MADELINE IS DRAINING HER PINT OF GUINNESS, MUCH MORE ANIMATED NOW

MADELINE - I most definitely had the reins. It was 'my' project, and although it's hard to admit, it stayed mine, really, Mark and Claudy and I worked on the proposal together, and Mark and I on the facilitation together, but I really drove it, and did all the writing up. But when faced with questions about methodology, and 'Was it cooperative enquiry? (Heron & Reason, 2001) What sort of action research? Did you do cycles of action and reflection?' my answer is usually to draw pictures with my hands.

SHE PUTS HER GLASS ON THE BAR BEHIND HER AND STARTS TO MOVE HER HANDS. TOM WAITS CHURNS ON GRUFFLY IN THE BACKGROUND.

MADELINE - It had a life of its own. I 'spose that sounds a bit contradictory, but I think that because I was 'in charge' I let it have a life of its own. Reminds me of what Patricia Shaw talks about when she describes herself at work as 'being in charge but not in control.' (2002, p. 117).

That invitation brought in loads of responses, most saying they simple didn't have the time to spare, but would desperately like to know what we found when we found it. We started as a group of people sitting in a room asking each other what evaluation meant in the context of an international network working on 'important' issues, what others have since called 'social change networks' (Nuñez & Wilson-Grau, Appendix III), and how we might gather data to make some claim to knowing anything about what we were talking about. I pushed and pulled it along. I did the reading coz I had the time. Everyone else was working flat out. No-one but me wrote anything, again because I had the time (I was being paid for it) and the fire. I took what we all said and formed it into something that would spark more conversation. Like Shaw (2002) I tend to think of most of my work as happening through conversation. I took our conversations to be evidence that we were finding something out. It often had no form other than a meeting with a group, not always the same people, who had a particular interest in some aspect of our work. We ranged over seeking to understand the nature of our working together in networks, the many qualities and meanings attached to leadership, the ways in which our attachment to separating out and categorising, and to structure and planning, sat stiffly with our striving to be networked.

The 'thing' bubbled and grew, grew long tentacles and wound itself round our struggling minds. We sought different routes through it, and differed in our language, our practice and the shapes we wanted to put on it. My job, I felt and sensed, was to take the whole of the conversation, and make it possible for people to see and hear themselves in it, as well as allowing questions to emerge for the next round of conversation. In paper terms, that meant that I summarised and reflected on the sessions, and used different fonts for quoting different people as they entered the 'communicative space'. The group said they liked the way they could hear themselves together and separately, held within something that in a way did make sense although we couldn't necessarily see it at the time. I tended to be able to see more of it simply because I had the job of holding it.

If I think in terms of 'action', what we did more than anything was talk. And that talking was revealing. What we revealed then became subject to more questions and scrutiny. And it was really the first time any one of us had had the opportunity to sit with our work and talk about it, analytically and in conversation with others who did not need copious explanation.

Mainly we were network co-ordinators, a job which is peculiarly isolated from the institutional frameworks of identity that most participants in networks are attached to. We were and are 'network-centric' thinkers, fighting to subvert 'ego-centric' institutional norms (Miller & Stuart, 2004), driving the collaborative, horizontal power agenda through what Miller and Stuart describe as the Old Power of institutional concern for its own profile and results. Lots of isolation hit the euphoria of an instant connection. Quite a lot of energy was released.

In the end, the visible product of this work is a rather dry report. It was drafted by me and reworked through a process of the others reading, commenting, and clarifying what we meant. Through that process we came to what I think of as a level of simplicity that does not erase the complexity of what we were trying to analyse, and put on paper. This is very important.

SHE HOLDS A COPY OF 'CHURCH *ET AL.* (2003) PARTICIPATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND DYNAMIC CHANGE', UP TO THE CAMERA.

MADELINE - I'm afraid you are now going to need to read this, before the rest of the interview will make any sense.

No. 121

PARTICIPATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND DYNAMIC CHANGE:
New Thinking On Evaluating The Work Of International Networks
Madeline Church *et al*
2003

MADELINE - Go to Appendix I, grab a seat, a drink, take your time, read, and we'll carry on tomorrow, OK?

SCENE THREE: MADELINE AND THE INTERVIEWER ARE SEATED AT A TABLE OVERLOOKING THE THAMES ON THE CAFÉ BALCONY OF THE TATE MODERN. BOTH HAVE CAPPUCCINOS. MADELINE IS STIRRING HERS.

MADELINE - The thing is, what you see on the page in Working Paper 121 doesn't tell you much about the complexity of our work together or how I influenced the direction and outcomes. I guess I am trying to fill in that gap here, because what matters to me here and now is process. I am heartily encouraged by Humberto Maturana's (A day with Humberto Maturana) attention to the importance of process, because it is here that living happens. And I for one am interested in living, not results.

CAMERA NOW IN CLOSE UP ON MADELINE'S FACE. DISSOLVE INTO

MADELINE WEARING GLASSES IN FRONT OF A COMPUTER SCREEN. SHE IS CONCENTRATING HARD AND WRITING FURIOUSLY

MADELINE VO - Over the period of nine months our Action Research Group has met 8 times. Each time I have made sure we have a decent room, and plenty of biscuits. I have also co-facilitated the meetings with my colleague, Mark, to enable me both to participate and lead. I have then revisited the meetings, created a different form from them, and provided all participants with this 'record'.

In looking back over the Action Research Group notes I notice that I have taken pains to make clear what it is that I am doing in the process. This is partly an issue of ownership, partly of transparency, partly of operating in concordance with what I consider to be a fundamental of the network form – the individual voice recognised and empowered within the collective. I have also put in the effort to ensure that each person who is participating is given their own words back so that their voice is heard as far as possible as they construct it. So I am knitting together the I of my own authentic voice as I interpret the dialogue we shared, I am grouping together the we of consensus where I hear it in the tapes, and I am offering up the personal voice as full of expression and individuality and creativity.

So in the notes for the first meeting, I believe I set something of the tone. Here my voice is clear, and the 'we' of the group is given initial form. The individual voices are as yet subsumed.

> *'In what follows I have attempted to capture the questioning spirit of the discussion, and highlight what appeared to me to be the key issues we were coming up against. This is not an exhaustive report of all that was said, obviously, and I take full responsibility for any missing elements, errrors or misunderstandings. Please offer feedback, it will enrich and deepen our work, I'm sure.' (Action Research Group notes)*

This introduction makes clear what I think I am doing: capturing the spirit, gathering the consensus, exposing the agency by claiming responsibility. I also put my authority in a place of iterative dialogue as I call for feedback which I believe to be enriching. In the second meeting I take the core of the discussion – participation – and offer us the individual voice and the group as symbiotic parts:

'This meeting was planned to take us deeper into what we mean by participation, what it looks like in our individual networks, and what the differences and points of convergence are between our assumptions about participation. It again took the form of a conversation in which we all participated, and in which all our voices were recorded. In writing up these notes, I seek to give each voice its own timbre and colour by using words actually spoken, while at the same time grouping our ideas to gain more understanding of the landscape we are charting' (Action Research Group notes)

Again there is the I and the we, the I searching for form that will do justice to the other Is and the we that we are becoming. The other Is have become part of the puzzle. This is an important reflection, and it was this commitment to holding the 'I' and the 'we' in tension together that I believe allowed the 'network image' to emerge. (Church *et al.*, 2003, Figure 3). The vision of a network of individuals knotted together in a web of open edged community by their shared values and diverse ideas, this image emerged from our joint practice, our connection and our creative individuality.

Similarly I give pride of place to the questions we raise rather than conclusions. This influences the process aspect of the work, the understanding I have that we are inquiring rather than deciding, and sets an open tone, a reflective and curious tone.

The notes are full of questions, some set out in question boxes, others embedded in the text. I know when I write up the notes that I seek to frame the questions as open questions: How questions, why questions although that may not have been how they were posed by the group. This is a deliberate act, designed to deepen and open rather than force conclusive answers. This is part of my individual way of being and knowing in the world, of not knowing and finding emerging questions to ask.

SCENE FOUR: A ROOM OF TEN PEOPLE, ALL WITH NOTEBOOKS, AND SEATED AROUND A RECTANGULAR MEETING TABLE. THE REMAINS OF A WORKING LUNCH ARE EVIDENT, AND A PACKET OF BISCUITS IS BEING TORN OPEN BY A LATECOMER. MADELINE AND A MAN OF SIMILAR AGE, MARK BITEL, WITH A GOATEE BEARD, ARE CLEARLY IN CHARGE

MADELINE VO - In the way we designed the first meeting, I wanted to avoid using the project proposal as submitted to and accepted by DfID as the working framework (see Proposal, pp. 62-66). I did not want to work through a proposal that frankly had been put together without consultation and really on the run. I was acutely aware that commitment from these busy and creative people would only come if they felt it was theirs, they could input and gain at the same time. We distributed the proposal but engaged the meeting to talk through what we understand by evaluation and what we understand by action research. This appreciation of participation, the input-gain circle, was and remains crucial to my growing understanding of what we are doing when we seek to work in networks. It also became a running theme of all our meetings and our work.

At a deeper level, my belief in the affirmative, the appreciative, the active positive approach (Ludema *et al.,* 2001; Anderson *et al.*, 2001; Alternatives to Violence Project, 1986) to working out what's going on (rather than the problem identification and solving approach) that has also given a certain lightness and creative impulse to our on-going research.

'In the introductions I asked that we all gave some indication of what it is about the work that we relish, enjoy, what drives us, what we like most about it. Overall there was a sense of satisfaction at the business of communicating, of facilitating communication, of building community across distances. Some of us felt freed by not being in a formal organisational structure.' (Action Research Group notes)

I can see the lightness in the agenda we proposed in that first meeting and we worked to:

Tentative Agenda

1. *Introductions – what inspires us to do our work?*
2. *What is the project, and how can we all benefit from it?*
3. *What do we understand 'evaluation' to mean? What is 'action research?*
4. *What are the questions we want to ask about evaluation in a network context?*
5. *What can we contribute?*
6. *What help do we need?*

If, for instance, I imagine the agenda written differently for a minute, and use some of the words that are often used when people in my profession meet and talk to one another in workshops, the agenda might have looked like this:

1. *Introductions – what challenges do we face in our work?*
2. *What is the project, and what do we need from it?*
3. *What do we find difficult about evaluation?*
4. *What will the project do for me?*
5. *How will it help me?*

I instantly feel the weight of problems, difficulty, effort, demand. I feel like sagging in my chair, and all the stuff that my work throws up, that I come to these kind of workshops to get away from, is immediately present and all-surrounding, like a suffocating blanket. The simple use of other words, generative words, sparks up the potential that I see, and makes me lean forward in my chair to catch the breath.

I can also see how this setting of tone in part led to the development of the first 'output' of the Group – the Contributions Assessment approach (Church *et al., 2003, p. 27).* Actually, it is more than tone, it is more profound. It is staying true to a value-base, to a belief in inspiration and creativity and shared inquiry as crucial elements in any way of working that intends to change things for the better in this world.

I am also doing in this research work what I believe I do in my work as a coordinator for the ABColombia Group. I am both facilitating a process of consensus-building, recognising the strengths of individual members and what they can contribute, at the same time as offering leadership. By leadership I mean moving things forward, pushing at the boundaries, challenging us to innovate, motivating us all.

'This time I have attempted to draw greater conclusions and make proposals for how we might use tools and take things forward. This is partly as I take responsibility for keeping the process rolling and the wheel oiled, and partly simply to generate further thinking, discussion and experimentation with what is possible.' (Action Research Group notes)

I can see that I become more confident in this role in the Action Research Group as the relationships consolidate and the group starts to feel a sense of cohesion. I am more detailed in my explanations of what I have done with the material, more transparent, and also more authoritative. I believe this confidence and authority comes as a result of the way I am facilitating the work, working to interconnect the three different subjectivities: the I of Madeline, the Is of the participants, and the we of those connected Is. As I say above, taking my own authority and leading, calling up the strengths and quirks and interests of each individual, building a community out of us all, and pushing us forward again.

> *'What I have done with the notes this time is to give a quick summary of what we talked about. Then I have drawn out some quotes and indicated where people think they have advanced on Monitoring and Evaluation in their work. I have noted the discussions around networks and power, and how we might look at this in more depth. I have also highlighted the tensions around facilitating and leading, and propose that it can also be construed as a tension between process and action, or mediation and advocacy. I have pulled together all the thinking so far into 'Guidance for a Contribution Assessment' (see Guidance). Lastly I list some of the research questions that arose from this meeting, which we cannot necessarily address but are useful to keep in mind.' (Action Research Group notes)*

By the fifth meeting, I feel bold enough to start 'conceptualising', offering us ways that might enable us to begin to talk out there to an audience of 'third persons'.

> *'I have moved considerably beyond in the hope of drawing our thoughts together into a framework that might be useful for us and others who are practically involved in networks. This is not a 'conclusion' or the 'right approach', but one that I hope does justice to the key concerns we have expressed, and the tensions that exist in our work. To go back to basics a bit, this is an action research project, and as such its brief is to gather in understanding and experience from practitioners, and make that available in a more 'conceptualised' form to others. That is, build the theory on the practice, and not vice versa. The idea as always is to keep things moving.' (Action Research Group notes)*

I am acutely conscious that this conceptualising may not work for others. I feel tentative but excited about the prospect. I also feel a little threatened by the way in which other consultants and academics who have something to say on the matter are insisting on typologies of networks and the fit of type to purpose. I know I feel strongly about <u>not</u> doing typologies, but it may not be shared by the group. I know that I believe that the starting point of a network – the shared values and purpose and the diversity of participants - should be the aspects that define the way we work together and relate (structure). But I also know that people are keen on 'models'. As are research funders. It somehow anchors them in a solid world. The search for an image in some senses starts here, in resistance to the idea of models.

This is also the point where I begin to wrestle with an underlying anxiety that someone, either during the process of doing the action research, or here and now hearing this account of it, is about to shout, HOLD ON A MINUTE. WHERE'S THE METHODOLOGY, WHERE'S THE MODEL, WHERE'S THE UNDERLYING THEORY, WHERE'S THE LOG-FRAME, WHERE'S THE EVIDENCE, WHERE'S THE RIGOUR? If I think back hard, rigorously, then I remember that from this moment on the project generated a kind of fearful how-do-I-write-this-up kind of attention from me, and we moved out of the cosy circle of conversation and into the 'third-person' place, where we had to account for what we'd been doing, in writing, and present it in a form accessible and useful for others.

That meant the hard-slog of turning fun, and inquiry and practice and art, into the dry flat smooth planed-down professionalism of a 'report on evaluation of international networks'. If the feedback is anything to go by, it has been used widely, in myriad ways, by a real variety of people across the globe struggling like us to make sense of network organising.

SCENE FIVE: BAR

MADELINE FIDDLES PENSIVELY WITH HER EMPTY PINT GLASS. SHE LOOKS QUIZZICALLY AT THE CAMERA. SEEMS TO WONDER WHETHER TO SPEAK

MADELINE - There are two core moments in the process that are worth a bit more time, a bit more attention, as they say a lot about how being in conversation with others is both a source of inspiration and generates creativity. The first moment is a more detailed account of how the Contributions Assessment idea came in a flash of inspiration.

SCENE SIX: A BUSY OXFORD STREET. BICYCLES, NOISE OF TRAFFIC, BLACK CLOUDY SUNNY WEATHER, A RAINBOW MIGHT APPEAR. WE SEE MADELINE RUN-WALKING TOWARD CAMERA. AS SHE GETS CLOSER WE SEE HER FACE LIT UP WITH AN EXPLOSION OF IDEAS, SHE IS ALMOST SKIPPING, AND SWINGING HER RUCKSACK LIKE A KID COMING HOME FROM SCHOOL.

MADELINE VO - The thought - it happened as I was walking back from a meeting about the project with two people I thought were proper professionals in the field. I didn't count myself as a 'proper' professional. Like many actors, I carry a huge conviction that I will be 'found out' as a fraud, and that has not changed as I have zig-zagged my way from one profession to another. It was very early days and I was struggling. In the conversation with Candy and Tina, while I was trying to 'explain' the project, and in some way 'account for myself' to a pair who seemed to me to be very experienced and likely to know more than me, I had said the word 'contribution' and the word 'need' and begun to play with them. In the development world, and these were two women from the development world, 'meeting needs' is a project norm. Funding is dedicated to meeting needs. Funding comes as a result of an assessment of the level and variety of need. Needs assessments are commonplace justifiers. As I was talking, a haze began to clear. It was like a sherbert exploding on my tongue. Fizzy, and tickly up the nose, and warm as it spread.

As I was walking back through the streets of Oxford, a fitting place to have a moment of conceptual inspiration, suddenly the idea of thinking about what people can contribute, what they can add to the mix, put in, took the notion of 'needs' and 'demands' and flipped it on its head. What makes a network sustainable and alive is what people put in, I thought. What they get out is altered by this. Contributing brings good things. If we just shift our minds round 180 degrees and think of ourselves as potent, full of dynamism and energy and good ideas, instead of needy and empty and waiting, we can see what this network thing is all about. It's not about meeting needs, it's about sharing the wealth we have, and creating more through that sharing.

The thrill – it all fitted together. The importance I attach to focusing on the positive, the affirmative, and the life-enhancing rather than the energy-draining seemed encapsulated

in this idea. I don't claim to be able to live it; it is just that I fully believe that it has a capacity to affect us at a very profound level. I am an intensely critical person, and highly resistant to joining any happy, clappy, positive-thinking club, but my experience tells me that engaging people in discussing best possibilities rather than fixing problems takes us to a different, more creative place. In my work as an AVP facilitator, the emphasis we placed on looking for our best selves consistently surprised me in its power to affect those who have lived with violence all their lives.

The fear was that my colleagues would think it a babyish and simplistic idea. I had set myself up to 'run' this project and I knew at least one person wanted to get beyond the 'same-old-same-old' and think differently and creatively about networks. I felt I had to deliver something, and in a context in which people are very problem-focused. I took the idea to my colleague Mark. I was excited but he didn't seem at the time to leap with me. I felt flat. Then he rang me back, and it was as if the idea had percolated through him as it had through me. He was suddenly really excited by the idea. So simple. We introduced it at the end of our next Action Research Group meeting

SCENE SEVEN: MARK, MADELINE, PRIYANTHI, SALLY, CANDY, KATHLEEN AND MANISHA ARE SEATED AROUND A RECTANGULAR MEETING TABLE. A TAPE RECORDER IS RUNNING, AND MADELINE IS LOOKING NERVOUS. MARK IS SMILING ENCOURAGINGLY.

MADELINE - As a result of the last meeting, I went away and started thinking again about networks, and the specificities of networks, and what networks are, and why they are different, and I was really struck by two things: one is that people talked about the *needs* of their participants. There was lots of talk about how we get people to participate, what are the *needs?*, are we meeting the *needs?*, what net benefit will people get out of it?, people will only participate if they see added value, some people are participating a lot, others not participating at all, a lot of stuff about 'Is the network meeting the needs of its members?'

And I went away and thought, this is a very project approach. What is it that makes a network sustainable and gives a network its energy? It will only be sustainable not because of what you or I or Kathleen do, but because people have a driving interest. Where does a network come from? People meet at a workshop, at a conference, somewhere, and they say 'Oooh, I didn't know about you, I do something rather similar', or 'we could do something together' and before you know what has happened it's possible that you have a network on your hands. It comes from – 'you're doing this, and I'm doing that, and the two of us could do something bigger together.'

What we should be doing as a starting point, is not a needs assessment but a <u>contributions assessment</u>. What is it that you do that you would like to bring into a wider environment?, what is it that you have that you would like to share? What is that drives you?, what is it that is at the centre of your work?, where is the energy for you? What can you offer to someone else? My theory is, and it needs to be tested, that if you start from a place of 'what have you got that everyone else can share?' rather than 'what haven't you got that needs filling?' then you will have a rich mass of different dishes on the table, which all actually relate to something we have in common, and people can look around and say, I didn't know I needed that but actually I could use some of that, in order to give me the energy that I need to keep going. I think that if we start from a 'what can I

contribute?' approach rather than 'what can I get out of it?' approach, then the needs they think they have will actually end up being substantially different.

CANDY - 'I don't know I need it until it's offered' is part of the thinking behind that, is that right?

MADELINE - One, I may not know I need it until I know it's there, or know it exists, and that I could possibly share some of it with you, but also two, if I start from a place of 'what is my need?', I end up saying, 'you must fill my need, this is what the network must give me,' rather than 'this is what I can offer and you could benefit by what I need to give you for this to work.' It seems to me that we are struggling a lot with participation and how to get people to participate, and if that is the question, then looking at what people can give is often a really good way to get people involved. So if you were starting from the planning stage, for instance, Sally, your document gives a really good overview of what people do, so that if you were to go back to them and ask them what they could bring, and contribute, then you might get an understanding of what people's *real* capacity is, how much you, Sally, as the secretariat, need to do that can't be done by other people, what is the extra that you, Sally, need to put in.

PRIYANTHI - yes that's brilliant...that's really good.

MADELINE – and I just thought, Oh, we're going about this from a completely...maybe if we switch it round the other way..

SALLY - I can't quite see...I can't quite see the great realisation..

MARK - I think that so often people just do the needs assessment and then they evaluate on 'have your needs been fulfilled' whereas in this people both give and take, if a network is working effectively it is not all give and it is not all take, it's give and take..and so therefore you need some kind of assessment of not just what do you need from us but what can you contribute..

MADELINE: Ye....

MARK - sorry just one more thing, and not only does that put more stuff in the pot that can be used by the network, but then when it comes time to reflect and evaluate on how successful the network has been, in shifting these resources round the network, you can ask them if they have been able to contribute, have the facilitation structures of the network enabled you to contribute what you had to give?, rather than did it just fill you up. If contributing is an indicator of participation and empowerment,

MADELINE - Yes

MARK - then actually looking at what people had to offer, and then going back and asking them if they were able to give that, seems to me to be completely uncharted.

SALLY – oh that's much clearer, but that's where I started off, because the network didn't exist, there were only 17 organisations on the committee, and one of things that I used was that I didn't think they were targeting the resources in their organisation to enable them to contribute to the network effectively.

MADELINE – right.

SALLY - For example, Amnesty International was on the management committee, and I thought that given that they have a massive global reach in masses of countries with loads of volunteers working on human rights, I thought them being on the management committee was a waste of their resources, so I discussed it with them and they've decided now that it would be much better if they were on the regional networks group and able to put in their resources regionally.

MADELINE – well you're one step ahead..

SALLY – no I'm not.

ALL - you are!

SALLY – but we haven't actually got a network going yet.

EVERYONE LAUGHS

KATHLEEN – to a certain extent we have done that, mainly with our executive committee, we haven't done it so much with the broader network..

MADELINE - exactly.

KATHLEEN – but people are contributing, for instance through me starting things, like the newsletter, I don't go out and solicit stuff, they send it to me without me asking which is a help, but we did a sort of needs assessment on the committee and one of the questions was, 'What do you think you can do to contribute' , and people say why they joined and what skills they would like to contribute, but it's easy to *list* them

MADELINE - yeah

KATHLEEN - and I guess that the next thing is monitoring, because we will set up little working group things and then just before the meeting something comes up and people cancel, because for some reason, we haven't quite got there, we haven't quite got that contribution in a proactive contributory way, instead of them saying that their *need* is that they want to put in. Like in a sense there's a difference, some people will say that they have a contribution to make but that may be to get their voice heard or to learn, instead of them saying that they, almost selflessly if you like, I want to make a contribution to be able to get it going and I'm willing to put the time in, not everybody is like that, there are people who are willing to put it the time, and I don't know if I'm going round in circles but I think we need to look at the difference between real contribution and people only saying I want to contribute in a needy sort of way.

SALLY - I think that maybe I've done it with one or two organisations, but I haven't done it in any way systematically and I haven't done it in any way which is measurable.

MARK - And that systematically and measurably gives you a baseline to reflect on at later date to find out how you facilitated it.

PRIYANTHI - That's quite brilliant actually, because in the secretariat team we were always getting quite concerned about these needs, and we said it is more than just meeting individual needs of members. So in our report I asked people to say about their work in the past year and we do a summary of stuff, using the specific aims and ask them how they have contributed to the specific aims and the good thing about that is because we have such diverse members, it puts them all on an equal footing. So our donors are telling us how they can promote networks at a national and regional level, and our national networks are saying exactly the same thing, and although the donors might be giving us money, that's just an additional contribution, they are on the same level in a substantive way. And it also gives us the same basis for the Secretariat. We can say what our contribution is, to highlight gaps, for instance about gender and transport. So I think it's a really useful way of putting the cards on the table in a fairly equal way.

MADELINE - And my sense would be and I may be wrong, that if you start from that place, it is much easier for you to see as a network where the added value would be, so that you're not replicating things because you can see they are happening somewhere else, or you can pass on someone who needs some thing to someone who has it, but the very process of looking at what it is possible for everyone to contribute will change the direction of the work, in a way that going the other way will change it in a different way.

SALLY - It's gaps, if you find that you haven't got anyone with advocacy skills, you can start looking for an organisation to join the network who has that.

MADELINE - So the idea of presenting it at this stage, to find out if it is worth exploring, we could try and develop some kind of simple, sophisticated tool that would enable us to do such an assessment of the network that we are currently involved in..

CANDY - Could you get it done by yesterday?

THEY ALL LAUGH

CANDY - I'm going out to the Middle East at the end of the month.

MARK - But pragmatically, ask that question, and get that information recorded, because if what a network does is shift knowledge and information and stuff round a system, then knowing what there was in the first place is useful in order to enable you to make an assessment about whether you have enabled that to happen.

CANDY - In the Lebanon we will be doing what we call a mapping, to try and get some of this information, and I also like the way of switching it around to contribution, I like the way that it's starting from the positive energy. I'm just curious if there are bits of tools somewhere to start adapting. But just picking up on something Madeline was saying, I heard something saying, forget the lack at the moment, because the lack will

come out of what we have got, and I am curious about that, as a question, will it actually or not..?

MADELINE - That's why we need a tool that allows a questioning process to happen, because it's not just a question of saying what can you contribute....I think the more broken down and more questioning of that contribution you can be, the more useful it is as information.

MARK - and I think the needs will emerge,

MADELINE - I do too..

MARK - they will either emerge through clear gaps, or through looking at the strategy of what we are trying to do and what we have to do it with, I don't just mean financial resources, the inputs or contributions of the people, or even if you are doing a contributions assessment people will still say 'yes but, this is what I need'.

MADELINE - Yes they will.

MARK - They will still voice it without being asked, you will hear, and if it is an important enough need it will come through loud and clear.

CANDY - But are you actually suggesting that you steer clear of what people need, that you let that arise, as opposed to asking people 'what is your contribution?' and 'what is your need?'.

MARK - As a deliberate strategy, yes,

MADELINE - As a deliberate approach, yes,

PRIYANTHI - I think that is really interesting, that's really good, because what you are saying is that you are in this network because you have something to contribute.

MADELINE - how the network can be helped, and that's what I think is different, I think networks are different, and the fundamental difference is that the network only works and only exists because of what members put into it, and if you don't know what members can put in, what are we doing?

PRIYANTHI - we should have found this out about a month ago.

THEY ALL LAUGH LOUDLY

SALLY - I had somebody say the other day 'the thing that our organisation can do for the network is write out in simple language a lot of the complicated international procedures to share with people', and I thought, 'that would be nice...'

MADELINE – and then you don't have to do it.

SALLY - well exactly.

MARK - you just have to get it out and round the network, so that once it has been done it has a distribution.

MADELINE - and the point is that it is not that people are not doing that, people are contributing, but it is the starting point, it is somehow the hook point, and it's absolutely to do with my own philosophy I suppose, if I am driven by what I lack, I give away my power and I give away my energy, I give away my sense of self. If I am driven by what I can contribute, I engage because I think that what I can contribute is valuable.

KATHLEEN - I think this is quite timely, because one of the objectives that we identified as what we wanted to do was to set up a system of assessing learning needs of people in the network.

THEY ALL LAUGH AGAIN

KATHLEEN: and I was hoping that participating in this would give me some ideas of what to do and how to do that, so this is great. I think it is wonderful to turn it around to contributions; it's much more proactive and much more positive.

CANDY - I have a little caveat, if I thought of going round and asking a group of individuals 'what can you contribute?', there would be some real cultural conditioning going on there, and the women might well be the first people to say 'well I can't contribute anything', or someone in another culture, so we have to be careful that we don't exclude people, that we only take the most confident.

MADELINE - But I think if we take what we would normally do in any needs assessment, it would have to have the gender awareness there, the cultural context there, so it doesn't exist outside the norms, it's rooted in the same kind of awareness, so you think through the tool so that you can draw out the power dynamics or the resource dynamics, but that somewhere along the line what your are talking about is valuing, a whole range of things, and that one is not more valuable as a contribution than others.

CANDY - No but that you support people through that process.

MARK - Maybe through the use of a wide range of examples, would help to stimulate thinking about what the different types of contributions, examples of what other people have said they could contribute, at different levels, they can be theoretical to start off with, so that you suggest a range that are all equally valid.

CANDY - And that people don't think that this is something extra, or different to their normal work.

MADELINE - Exactly, for me this is about being realistic as well, people say 'I'll participate in that, I'll do that' and actually they participate in one meeting in the whole year, or responded twice to what they said they would respond to, and you realise this is obviously not a realistic assessment of what you can contribute, and we need to go back and say 'ok you said this is what you could

contribute and this is what has actually happened, is there any way we can make those two things more alike'.

PRIYANTHI: Well I think that the contribution engenders commitment.

MADELINE: Exactly, it's about engendering commitment.

THE GROUP CONTINUE TALKING IN THE BACKGROUND

MADELINE VO - listening back to the tape, my voice is very loud and excitable and I laugh inappropriately and strangely. I can hear on the tape the way I am desperate for my idea to be approved by others, that I am fearful it will be seen as simplistic and idiotic and that I will be exposed as a fraud. I am conscious that Priyanthi is in this group to get new ideas about the subject and I have been worried that I have to produce them. Yet I am also very engaged by the simplicity of the idea and how it slots right into my value base, and my beliefs about how we build a better world.

SCENE EIGHT: DISSOLVE BACK INTO BAR SCENE.

MADELINE - After this meeting I write it up. I use the tape, then an annotated version of the conversation, then I distil it into the notes of the meeting. It is beginning to settle nicely, it feels right.

As a group we develop some guidance for others about it – this happens in our next meeting, and mysteriously the tape for this section doesn't work. I have to make it up from my notes which were paltry. Maybe I don't want to share the credit. I give all in the group the credit but reserve some for myself by putting my name on the front as having drafted it.

MADELINE WAVES ANOTHER DOCUMENT AT THE CAMERA. WE SEE

CONTRIBUTIONS ASSESSMENT – A TOOL FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN A NETWORK

Guidance for gathering in the range of contributions that network members might make to a network

DRAFTED BY MADELINE CHURCH

A network depends for its life and vitality on the **input** of members. Networks tend to grow out of conferences, seminars, conversations, joint projects, where people connect through common agendas and purpose and think that they can offer one another and the wider world something **better together than separately**. A secretariat helps to **facilitate** the exchange and connection between those who participate, and to **draw on and circulate** the resources of members for the greater good, and towards the achievement of the overall shared aim.

One of the key issues for network projects and for those who coordinate networks is **participation**. How members participate, why some participate more than others, how to encourage greater participation, how to 'measure' participation.

A contributions assessment seeks to add another layer to needs assessment approaches. Most of us working in development and human rights are used to the needs assessment approach, of establishing a base line of project end-user needs before the project starts. You can then evaluate the work against that baseline, seeing if needs have actually been met by the project.

A Contributions Assessment aims to find out what people might **contribute**. It can then serve as a baseline for assessing **if the network enabled its members to contribute over time**, and how that contribution gave **added value** to the network.

The underlying philosophy

A **network** thrives on the drive, commitment and passion of its members. It is the combination of **diversity** (many autonomous institutions and individuals) **and a common purpose**, which gives a network power and energy. It is thus vital for a network to know what resources its members have and would be prepared to contribute and share. The aim of a contributions assessment is to hook into where the energy lies for the members, and involve people through their passion and drive to make a difference.

- A contributions assessment maps what members believe they can contribute to a network project. We are not talking simply about financial commitment in terms of a grant, but human resources, activities, skills, and energy. Value is placed on the interest and willingness to contribute, not the size or extent of what members can contribute
- A contributions assessment pays attention to power differences, and obstacles to commitment
- A contributions assessment enables the network as a whole to see what resources it can draw on and where it might need to seek extra members or resources
- A contributions assessment enables members to be realistic about what they can commit to – they are asked to think carefully about what such a contribution means for them in terms of time and energy and resources.
- A contributions assessment gives you baseline information against which you can evaluate. It enables you to ask –has the network provided its members with the opportunities they wanted to contribute? Has it enabled them to share in what is already in the pot? Has it enabled them to participate in making a difference?
- Evaluation can be done on how successful the network secretariat or coordinator has been in shifting the resources around the network, and how far the facilitation structures of the network have enabled that exchange to occur.

How you might do a Contributions Assessment

- Keep it focused on **contributions** – we all find it a lot easier to articulate what we might need rather than what we can add. The needs will get articulated in other ways.

- Decide who your contributors are – general membership, donors, steering committees, national network coordinators, secretariat, ...
- Be clear about what your network is aiming for – its helpful to have a simple statement or diagram that presents what the network is for, to enable people to see how and where they can contribute (see Weaver's Triangle for Networks as an example)
- Provide specific examples of contributions – participation in a committee, designing newsletter, organising a conference, doing policy analysis, etc. This will help members to define where their expertise might fit in.
- Ask members to think carefully about what they would like to contribute and how they might deliver it.
- Find out what the secretariat or coordinating function can do to enable people to contribute more effectively.

MADELINE - I send it to a person in Africa who has emailed me for guidance on a workshop they are holding to discuss whether or not to set up a network. Mark uses it in an evaluation he is working on with a partnership of organisations. We try it out with the networks involved. It goes into the report. The report starts to circulate and get responses. And interestingly, as you will see later on, I begin to question the whole notion of 'neediness' in many different settings, hoping to begin wider discussions on how to tap into the potential energy and brilliance we all bring into connection with one another, and what we can offer up.

CAMERA PULLS OUT AGAIN

A COUPLE HAVE NOW ENTERED THE BAR, AND SIT APART, IN DISCREET CONVERSATION. MADELINE RELUCTANTLY DRAGS HER EYES FROM THEM, COMES BACK TO CAMERA

MADELINE - The other moment was one of those slow-burns, a creeping response to words that won't go away, like a song stuck replaying in your head, a melody that catches itself round and round. Again, a couple of others were involved, again people I had never met before who wanted to 'know' something about me and my work, to whom I was trying to 'account' for myself. Obviously telling stories about my self sets something off....

SCENE NINE: A WORKSHOP ROOM WITH TWENTY PEOPLE ALL ARRANGED IN PAIRS AT TABLES, SITTING ON THE FLOOR, ON CHAIRS, TALKING AND LISTENING AND SOMETIMES LAUGHING. MADELINE IS TALKING WITH HER HANDS. THESE ARE NOT THE SAME PEOPLE AS IN THE ACTION RESEARCH GROUP MEETING

MADELINE VO: On a wet day in March, I attended a workshop. First we had to do a 'getting-to-know-you' thing with the person next to us, and feed back to the group. As usual I felt slightly sick at the prospect, determined to protect myself, asking myself yet again why I put myself through this kind of group thing. I have no memory of this conversation. In the feed-back session, I listened to two people, Sara and Ty, who spoke softly and beautifully about their 'getting to know you' conversation. I listened rapt to Ty's description of Sara's searching questions which had opened up their communication.

They smiled and acknowledged each other with vulnerability and tenderness. It was a bit like watching an early moment in a love affair. I wanted very much to be part of their bubble. In the following exercises I went looking for Sara and for Ty. I ended up working with him.

The keys words in my brain that day were inspiration, creativity, networks. I had read lots about the latter, and am in search of the former, always, as a way of getting us all high on what we are up to. We talked about all this, and about the flexible, robust, muscular use of language we are after to bring our stuff to life. He said these words in the course of our varied conversation:

threads, knots and nets threads knots and nets threads knots and nets

He kept asking me about my work, and I wanted to explain, but didn't know how.

SCENE TEN: CUT BACK TO THE BAR
MADELINE IS REALLY MOTORING, WALKING UP AND DOWN, ANIMATED, ALIVE

MADELINE - A week later I am sitting in the UN library in Geneva, cramming in some work on my research before having to become the 'lobby-networker' that I am paid to be. I can hear the words

threads, knots and nets threads knots and nets threads knots and nets

floating around, like music, and I start to draw them. I know what I am looking for. I am looking for an image and a concept that will help us in the Action Research Group to differentiate the work of the network from the work of the secretariat or coordinating function; to distinguish the work of the network from the work of its members; to see and understand the network structure as something unique, radically different from the norm of organisational structure. I am looking for a way to help us to talk about governance structures and decision-making so that we can see a way out of the tendencies toward more rule-making and greater reach for control. I want to see The Difference and be able to explain it, conceptually.

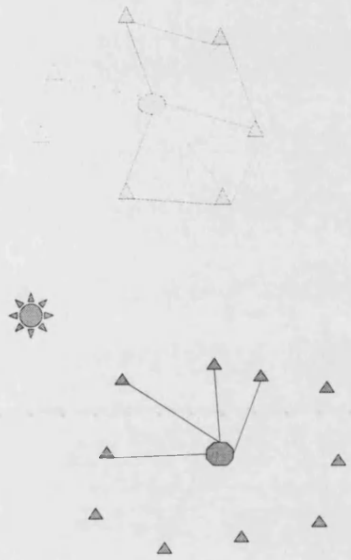
I mess about with little triangles – representing members or participants – connected to other members via threads.

SHE HITS THE KEYBOARD OF A LAPTOP ON THE BAR AND A SCREEN LIGHTS UP BEHIND HER, A POWER-POINT DIAGRAM COMES INTO VIEW

MADELINE - This isn't new, I've been doing this for ages, on paper, on the computer, in my mind at night before sleep. I put the co-ordination secretariat in the middle and make lines in and out, bilaterally and multilaterally.

SHE SCROLLS TO THE NEXT SLIDE

MADELINE - I have the little triangle participants connected to the co-ordination secretariat, I put in dotted lines to break it up, Starkey (1997) does this, others do this, this is not new. But it doesn't feel right.

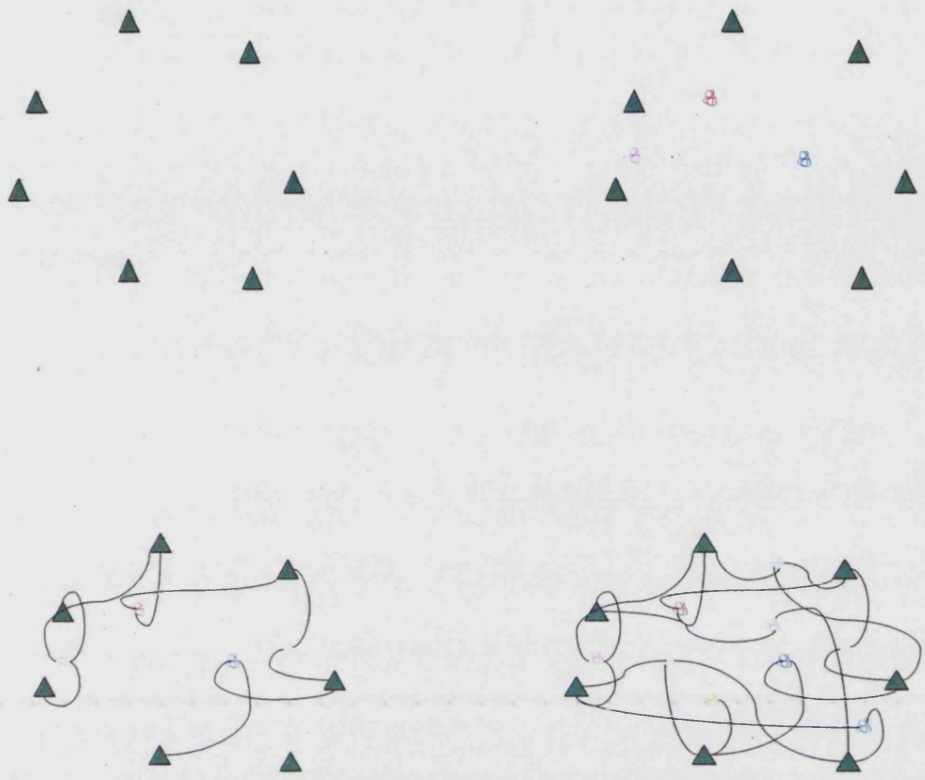


SHE FLIPS IT OFF AGAIN

MADELINE - I return to my fundamentals. The network is based on the relational. This is the process that gives the network its strength. The common purpose is what makes it a network, not simply networking. We are in pursuit of something joined, something together, and something explicit which we have signed up to. And then we are doing, we are undertaking, and engaging in an effort to realise that goal. It is the joint activity that gives us edge and power. This is what's missing from the picture: the activity we do together.

The inspirational moment hits me – SO OBVIOUS and so simple.

SHE RUNS THE POWER-POINT PRESENTATION



MADELINE - The threads join us together through the knots of our joint activity. It is the relational, engaged in the creational, that creates the structure. The threads tie together in knots and create the strength to hold us. The co-ordinator, or secretariat is the artisan. Keeps the net in good order, knows which knots are best for what, notices the breaks and fraying and seeks to rejoin them.

It was a moment of great clarity and inspiration. And I'd got there through reading, talking, thinking, talking, reading, thinking, and waiting for the images and words. I waited for them and they came.

SHE SMILES AT THE INTERVIEWER, ENERGETIC, RADIANT

God, is it true that both these events are sparked by people asking me questions about my work and my life? And me actually finding a way to answer them, instead of avoiding them?

SHE GOES AND SITS AT THE TABLE WHERE THE COUPLE ARE STILL TALKING QUIETLY

MADELINE - How amazing.....

THE CAMERA PULLS OUT, THE SCREEN DISSOLVES INTO TEXT

'It is difficult to know with precision how things became as they have, to be able to say with some assurance that first it was this and it then led to that and the other, and now here we are. The moments slip through my fingers. Even as I recount them to myself, I can hear echoes of what I am suppressing, of something I've forgotten to remember, which then makes the telling so difficult when I don't wish it to be. But it is possible to say something, and I have an urge to give this account, to give an accounting of the minor dramas I have witnessed and played a part in, and whose endings and beginnings stretch away from me. I don't think it's a noble urge. What I mean is, I don't know a great truth which I ache to impart, nor have I lived an exemplary experience which will illuminate our conditions and our times. Though I have lived, I have lived.....I have time on my hands, I am in the hands of time, so I might as well account for myself. Sooner or later we have to attend to that.' (Gurnah, 2000, p.2)

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

SCENE ONE: MADELINE IS LOLLING ON A GREEN SOFA IN AN UNTIDY LIVING ROOM, HALF-READING A RATHER TATTY BOOK. SHE HAS A REMOTE CONTROL, AND THE VIDEO OF PART ONE IS PAUSED ON THE GURNAH TEXT. SHE TURNS TO SPEAK INTO A VIDEO CAMERA, MAKING A VIDEO DIARY

That 'how amazing' really was what I said to myself as I wrote that last scene. I have spent five years going to supervision sessions with Jack Whitehead, Jonathan Gibbs and Eleanor Lohr, and I can hear a repeated refrain that plays in the background of every conversation. What is it that you do, Madeline?

My sister has said and my father and brother have said and my friend Sheila and Phyllida have said, 'someone asked me what you do for a living, and I realised I couldn't really say.'

I have noticed that when anyone asks me what my research is about I say, 'I'll tell you when I know.'

Avoiding answering questions for fear of being known. Answering questions with questions to divert attention. I hadn't realised how much my thirst for conversation with others releases creative potential in me when I stop blocking and start responding to inquiries about who I am and what I do. Are you getting to know me any better? I certainly am.

SHE WAVES THE BOOK AT THE CAMERA – WEB OF LIFE BY FRITJOF CAPRA

I came upon Capra (1996) at the end, at the end of the action research project. After I had struggled with conceptualising networks, and wound my way in and out of articulating how structure, relationship, action, and trust interact in building the dynamic tension of the network form. Capra's name kept appearing in bibliographies, lists, conversations, like a beckoning angel, as I read and wrote and thought and spoke and listened my way through the year of actual hands-on research, struggling to make sense. Web of Life was always out of the library, or missing from the shelf if in. It was out of stock in the bookshops.

So this last year, when it feels and appears as if I have done almost nothing, except slob about on this sofa, I have been immersed in Capra. First to say is that I am not a science graduate, never got beyond Human Biology A level, and cannot begin to talk knowledgably about mathematics of any kind, whether classical or the mathematics of complexity. Not going to try. But I am hoping to shed more light on my ideas by engaging with his (and through him many others). As a small contribution to talking across the artificial divides of 'disciplines' I am sure he would approve. He points out that one of the effects of the fragmentation in our Cartesian world is generalised mathematical ignorance and wider appreciation of the beauty of mathematics one of its casualties.

SHE OPENS THE BOOK AT A PAGE WITH THE CORNER TURNED DOWN AND BEGINS TO READ

'Today the new mathematics of complexity is making more and more people realise that mathematics is much more than dry formulas; that the understanding of pattern is crucial to understanding the living world around us, and that all questions of pattern, order and complexity are essentially mathematical.' (Capra, 1996, p. 150)

All that by way of justifying my sitting down with him. The pictures of Mandelbrot sets are beautiful.

Capra, like many of us, is asking the huge questions: How did complex structures emerge? What is the relationship between mind and brain? What is consciousness? He is trying to understand the 'integrative actions of living systems.' (p. *ix*)

Again like most of us, he is asking such questions in the midst of a significant shift in world-view that appears to be taking place across disciplines, from a mechanistic to a ecological world view, 'a unified view of mind, matter and life.' (p. *x*) The shift is not just about concepts, its about the words we use, the way we connect one thing to another, the communication forms we use, the images we have in our heads, the way we learn. For instance, he acknowledges in the preface that the linear structure of a written text is a real challenge when it comes to communicating the interconnected nature of ideas.

AGAIN SHE READS OUT LOUD

'In my struggle to communicate a complex network of concepts and ideas within the linear constraints of written language, I felt that it would help to interconnect the text by a network of footnotes.' (p.xi)

As a strategy it doesn't really work, but it's better than nothing. He himself is caught in the paradox of having to communicate a radically different interconnected networked non-linear world-view to others through a linear structure, possibly, but not necessarily imposed by publishing demands. It is interesting that when he talks about the way Romantics like Blake were leaders in rejecting Cartesianism, they were people who are remembered for their art, paintings, and poetry, their sheer visual and poetic artistry.

He writes about enormous world challenges - crises of poverty, environmental degradation, and rampant consumerism - and encapsulates it all into one 'crisis of perception.' 'It derives from the fact that most of us, and especially our large social institutions subscribe to the concepts of an outdated worldview, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our overpopulated, globally interconnected world.' (p. 4)

My sense is that there are many of us who do not subscribe to that world-view, certainly those I work with, but we are somehow chained to the concepts and structures by the very simple things like project proposals, evaluation methodology, and, of course, resources. What appeared in the sixties and seventies to be a flowering of other ways of seeking change in the world has been somehow high-jacked by the techno-rational top-down measure-or-be-bankrupted 'target'- obsessed world leadership we have today.

What Capra urges us to do is 'to question every single aspect of the old paradigm' (p. 7) - mechanical universe, human body as machine, competition as driving force of society, unlimited material progress, and subjugation of women by men - something that 'requires not only an expansion of our perceptions and ways of thinking, but also of our values.' (p.

9) Just reading his book I can feel Skolimowski's 'spiral of understanding' starting to disintegrate (1994, p. 223), so it's certainly challenging.

Most of all what Capra does is argue that the new paradigm is one in which the network has dominance. The network is the key metaphor, the structure, the organisational form, the concept that unifies substance, form and process. The beckoning angel has had it all along. I am not sure if I would have recognised it all if I had not got there myself another way, but this is a very reassuring book. Maybe too cosy? Or still too categorised? I'm not sure

This is a world where complexity, Mandelbrot sets, and sub-atomic particles make up the account he is offering of how life works, in which the masters of evolution are bacteria, and where evolutionary success is not a triumph of the fittest, but a co-created process of complementarities, cooperation, and coordination. Creativity is the key to greater degrees of complexity and interconnection, as self-producing bounded networks of feedback loops transform themselves through interaction with their environments. Heady stuff.

Capra reiterates that there has always been a tension between mechanism and holism, a 'dichotomy between substance (matter, structure, quantity) and form (pattern, order, quality)' (1996, p. 18)

This is a tension that is obvious in our social change networks, especially with the way in which people seek an 'easy' structural answer to what are often relationship issues. Capra gives priority to 'configuration and relationship as the important aspects of organisation' (p. 27), taking his lead from Aristotle, Goethe, the Romantics, and Kant. He sits much more comfortably with the idea of 'entelechy' - the idea that form is immanent in matter, and the separation of matter and form only possible in the abstract, than with Galileo's commitment to the measurable and quantifiable, or Descartes' reductionism. Goethe and the Romantics perception that form is a pattern of relationships within an organised whole is another way of expressing what I have tried to unpick when it comes to our networked way of working.

Capra doesn't do much in this book to 'apply' this thinking to social systems (the next book *The Hidden Connections* takes this further) but he certainly claims that

> *'the ideal structure for [influencing others] is not the hierarchy but the network, which is also the central metaphor of ecology. The paradigm shift thus includes a shift in social organisation from hierarchies to networks.' (1996, p. 10)*

SHE GETS UP NOW, STARTS TO WANDER ABOUT THE ROOM

Truth is, I have ended up with what seems like a long series of questions about the 'application' of his ideas to the social systems I am working with, as well as a clear sense that I think we are talking the same language, and that my ideas fit neatly with his.

He begins from a system point-of-view, which ultimately means understanding something by contextualising it and looking at it placed within a more extensive inter-connected picture.

'To understand things systemically literally means to put them into a context, to establish the nature of their relationships.' (p. 27)

'Systems thinking is contextual, which is the opposite of analytical thinking. Analysis means taking something apart in order to understand it; systems thinking means putting it into the context of a larger whole.' (p. 30)

SHE LOOKS AT THE ROOM, THE MIRROR, THE BITS OF HER LIFE, THE ART ON THE WALLS

His thesis is that not only is it not possible to view the whole through its component parts, but that looking at parts in isolation actually destroys the unique nature of the whole, which gains its uniqueness through the relationships and connections between the parts. Thus pattern makes structure.

'According to the systems view, the essential properties of an organism, or living system, are properties of the whole, which none of the parts share. They arise from the interactions and relationships between the parts. These properties are destroyed when the system is dissected, either physically or theoretically into isolated elements.' (p. 29)

This, I think, was part of my struggle to create a picture for us to work with in the networks research. The pictures we had as givens failed to show us anything about pattern (nature of relationship), they seemed only to reflect parts and the connections between them. We were working with bits of structure which we knew to be connected, but the meaning of that connection was missing. What I did, with my new network image was to put in the context, that social change networks are formed in order to *do something, to act.* And the doing something was the essential motivator for relationship.

So, given that my research questions are about how we find more appropriate evaluation approaches, especially when faced with questions about the 'effectiveness of social change networks', how does this 'systems/context' work help? Which context are we talking about?

Much of the mainly unspoken theory of organising in social change networks is that it allows for connection points into many more systems, systems that nestle within one another, than a single entity or organisation can possibly manage. The assumption is that if you can enter through as many connection points and levels as possible, shifts can be made that will inevitably disrupt and change the tissue of the beast.

This means that we are dealing with a seriously complex context. In all the networks I have talked to that are advocating for social change, everyone spends significant amounts of time analysing context. Indeed one of the really important aspects of this kind of working is the quality of analysis of context.

Capra, admittedly talking about quantum physics and sub-atomic particles (interconnections), concludes that

'The world thus appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole.' (Heisenberg, cited in Capra, 1996, p. 30)

This of course poses practical questions, both for doing and evaluating the doing. Where do you stop in your analysis of context? How do you work out what to do, where to act, when your analysis is necessarily complex and interconnected? How on earth do you do justice to such complexity when talking about evaluating? Capra echoes this cry,

SHE GOES UP CLOSE TO CAMERA, HER FACE FILLS THE SCREEN. SHE SAYS SLOWLY

'If everything is connected to everything else, how can we ever hope to understand anything? Since all natural phenomena are ultimately interconnected, in order to explain any one of them we need to understand all the others, which is obviously impossible.' (p. 40)

SHE SITS DOWN AGAIN WITH A FLOP

What is the whole system? What are we seeking to change? Can we even know or decide? Part of the problem in the action-oriented world of development, human rights and peace work is that we are used to understanding *action* in the frameworks of 'stepped approaches', linear cause and effect thinking, chains of objectives, roads to peace, construction metaphors such as peace-building, etc. When you try to attach this to system thinking and network realities, it's like trying to run a train on a swirling river system.

Capra himself challenges the norms of using architectural metaphors such as building blocks, foundations, fundamentals, for knowledge, and suggests the use of the network instead. This is an epistemology in which everything affects and is affected by everything else, so ideas of predictability, and cause-effect, especially the specious kind used in evaluation, stem from a flawed perception of how life works. If as Capra maintains,

'living systems at all levels are networks, we must visualise the web of life as living systems (networks) interacting in network fashion with other systems (networks)...The web of life consists of networks within networks.' (p. 35)

then we are banging our heads against a wall trying to match our 'logistical frameworks of intervention' and evaluation, with our social change network ways of organising.

Given that we can never know it all, nor be certain about the effect of acting in such a complex context, we might do well to think in terms of 'approximate knowledge' (pp. 40-41), which challenges Cartesian notions of certainty, suggesting we only ever deal with limited and approximate descriptions of reality. So what is enough approximate knowledge for us to be able to enhance the way we work and make good enough choices about how to work and on what?

Let's go back to structure and form.

SHE LIES BACK ON THE SOFA

The cyberneticists were the first to distinguish between the pattern of organisation and the physical structure of an organism. Of particular importance was the concept of negative and positive feedback. Both negative feedback (through which a system self-regulates by rebalancing itself) and positive feedback (through which a system runs into disorder and out of control by having no balancing mechanism) are important in the understanding of self-organising systems, ones that interact with and are changed by their environment.

> *'To understand the phenomenon of self-organisation, we first need to understand the importance of pattern.' (Capra, 1996, p. 80)*

The study of structure and that of form use completely different approaches.

> *'In the study of structure we measure and weigh things. Patterns, however, cannot be measured or weighed; they must be mapped. To understand a pattern, we must map a configuration of relationships. In other words, structure involves quantities, pattern involves qualities.' (p. 81)*

If what we are working with in networks is not substance but pattern, then we must abandon measuring and weighing and start mapping. This means we must learn how to map, how to understand and represent connection. This is even truer if we look at the work of influencing, which is about power to convince and change.

> *'The first and most obvious property of any network is its nonlinearity - it goes in all directions. Thus the relationships in a network pattern are nonlinear relationships. In particular, an influence, or message, may travel along a cyclical path, which may become a feedback loop.' (p. 82)*

We have to examine our context as if it were feedback loops, with an understanding of how to effect change in such loops and systems, knowing all the while that we cannot predict what the restructured form of the system will be, we cannot pretend to know. If, for instance, we identify a potential positive feedback moment, that is one in which if we continue to do more of the same the system will eventually break down, ... is this what happened with the Velvet Revolution?

SHE INDICATES A PHOTO OF VACLAV HAVEL ON THE WALL

All the self-regulating loops had ossified or in fact broken down, but nothing had really tested them to the limit? The self-regulating spies no longer had loyalty, they were no longer getting their payback, they could see that readjustment of the system would serve them better?

What about negative feedback loops, the way we 'learn' and rebalance and stabilise?

> *'a community that maintains an active network of communication will learn from its mistakes, because the consequences of a mistake will spread through the network and*

return to the source along feedback loops. Thus the community can correct its mistakes, regulate itself and organize itself.' (p. 82)

The system may also go to the edge of extremity for a time, but settle into a new better-informed order, once it understands the nature of the environment shock. For instance, if I think about what we (an extensive network of NGOs) did with Plan Colombia,

SHE PULLS A RELIEF MAP OF COLOMBIA FROM BEHIND A LAMP IN THE CORNER, TRACING THE CONTOURS AS SHE SPEAKS

we shocked the Colombian political regime (a network of power relations) into recognition that in Europe the non-governmental sector is not only vibrant but can have impact on governmental policy. It had to learn that in order to gain political support from old Europe, it needed to control the activity of not just Colombian non-governmental actors but international NGOs acting on their own territory. The international NGO network formed part of the context which the Colombian political system had failed to map. Three years on it has learned to discredit international NGOs, and prevent them from sabotaging its international relations.

What can we therefore say, in evaluative terms, about the work of this international NGO network? That it failed? This is what the prevailing wisdom is about this network, that it failed to persuade the inter-governmental alliances that Colombia should not benefit from their support while it continues to be a regime built on the abuse of fundamental rights. My own view would be that we used the best approximate knowledge of the context available, and grabbed the political opportunities with all its available resources, and forced a redefinition of the Colombian regime's international strategy. The big unknown, of course, was the sudden appearance of the global war on 'terror'. Contextually, this is like an earthquake.

SHE SITS ON THE FLOOR, CROSS LEGGED, READS AGAIN

Nature is "relentlessly non-linear".

'Non-linear phenomena dominate much more of the inanimate world than we had thought, and they are an essential aspect of the network patterns of living systems.' (p.122)

SHE LOOKS UP AT CAMERA

It is really scary that we are still so wedded to linear forms of explanation, accounting, and representation, when it seems so un-natural. We are also chained, it seems to me, to an unworkable model of predictive cause and effect, which so often fails us.

'In linear systems, small changes produce small effects, and large effects are due either to large changes or to a sum of many small changes. In non-linear systems, by contrast, small changes may have dramatic effects because they may be amplified repeatedly by self-reinforcing feedback. Such non-linear feedback processes are the basis of the instabilities and the sudden emergence of new forms of order that are so characteristic of self-organisation.' (p. 123)

Again, this challenges the entire way we think about projects and programmes in development, partly because we still think in terms of small input = small impact, and scaling up from pilot projects to macro interventions. We talk about steps and make linear plans which hood-wink us into believing that when we do x, y will result. We think we know what the effect of our interventions will be, and are asked to plot them in advance in Log Frame definitions. Yet if you look at any projects reporting on a Log Framework, there is a large column which sets out 'unintended outcomes' and 'unforeseen obstacles and threats'. Often these are more extensively completed than the ones we are supposed to be filling in. This should tell us a lot about our underlying frameworks, and their inadequacies..

> *'Chaotic systems are characterized by extreme sensitivity to initial conditions. Minute changes in the system's initial state will lead over time to large-scale consequences.' (p. 132)*

Capra contends that solutions vary, depending on very small changes in initial conditions making prediction over the long-range impossible. The new forms and shifts happen when the structure is far from equilibrium (far from dead), and a new order emerges out of amplifying feedback processes. This is where creativity kicks in, and it is entirely unpredictable.

Again, what does this do to our understanding of 'interventions', our predicting what the 'impact' will be of the work we do? Do we have any understanding of whether we are working in chaotic systems? If we think about chaos theory, it may be possible that small inputs lead to large significant transformation, I imagine as long as the feedback loops are there. What we can't know is what they will transform into.

Back to structure, form and process again. Capra distinguishes between pattern (form, order, quality), structure (substance, matter, quantity) and process ('the activity involved in the continual embodiment of the system's pattern of organisation' (pp. 153-7), process being the link between pattern and structure. The pattern is embodied in the structure and the process is the continual embodiment.

Thus pattern, structure and process are the three criteria for living systems, 'three different but inseparable perspectives on the phenomenon of life' (p. 156).

He understands pattern through Maturana & Varela's notion of autopoiesis, (self-making, pattern of organisation), structure through Prigogine's dissipative structure, and process through Bateson, then Maturana & Varela's, ideas of cognition, or mind.

This is quite challenging.

SHE LAUGHS

How does this relate to my network?

Let's take the idea of the dissipative structure and the autopoietic network.

Autopoietic networks are organisationally closed, that is they are autonomous, but they interact with their environment through exchange of energy and resources. But the interaction does not determine the organisation, they are self-organising. Their limits or boundaries are held by whether or not something participates in the process of the networks' living. They are not static, they are in relations of production.

The vital aspect of the dissipative structure theory, on the other hand, is one that combines order and change, stillness and motion. A dissipative structure is both open to the flow of energy and resources, but is organisationally closed. 'thus a living system is both open and closed – it is structurally open but organizationally closed.' (p. 164)

> *'Prigogine's theory interlinks the main characteristics of living forms in a coherent conceptual and mathematical framework that implies a radical reconceptualisation of many fundamental ideas associated with structure – a shift of perception from stability to instability, from order to disorder, from equilibrium to non-equilibrium, from being to becoming. At the centre of Prigogine's vision lies the co-existence of structure and change, of 'stillness and motion,' (p. 175)*

I am continually defending the seeming 'crisis' that exists in the networks I work in, the sense of 'we must evaluate and somehow put it right' because the tension between order and disorder is continual, there is no stability, only dynamic balance and we are nowhere near to understanding how to work with and maintain that balance. People are forever on the edge of pushing for a 'solution', which I now understand cannot solve anything, for there is nothing to solve. This is the shift in perception we need to move toward. Equilibrium means stasis:

> *'a living organism is characterised by continual flow and change in its metabolism, involving thousands of chemical reactions. Chemical and thermal equilibrium exists when all these processes come to a halt. In other words, an organism in equilibrium is a dead organism. Living organisms continually maintain themselves in a state far from equilibrium, which is the state of life. Although very different from equilibrium, this state is nevertheless stable over long periods of time..' (pp. 175-6)*

Dynamism means life, that is none-the-less stable in its tension. In real terms this means that we have to be brave in embracing what feels like disorder. It also means that we have to find creative ways to use, rather than resolve, the conflicting views and contrasting ideas that exist within the network, for this is what gives it vitality and breadth.

> *'In every community there will invariably be contradictions and conflicts, which cannot be resolved in favour of one or the other side. For example, the community will need stability and change, order and freedom, tradition and innovation. Rather than by rigid decisions, these unavoidable conflicts are much better resolved by establishing a dynamic balance. ... the contradictions within a community are signs of its diversity and vitality, and thus contribute to the system's viability.' (pp. 294-5, emphasis in original)*

So, if the relationships in our social change networks are configured to allow us to act together in the world outside, then our structure must embody both our relationships and our action. This, if I think about it, is what I came to with my diagrammatic representation of a net of relationships tied together through joint action. If process, in Capra's terms

mind, or the process of cognition, links pattern and structure, then our process must allow us to continually renew those relationships and reflect on our joint action and imagine new action to be taken as a result of action taken before. And such process generates trust, the embodiment of our relationships and our action.

Phew.

SHE LIES ON THE FLOOR, WITH HER KNEES BENT

This feels similar, although I begin to get to a point when the simple exercise of working to put these ideas into language that necessarily uses an analytic approach (breaking things down into structure, pattern and process) begins to generate a fog of confusion. I feel the separating boundaries start to dissolve like damp tissues and I can no longer use words alone, only images and poetics, to draw my way into an explanation of what I mean.

In some senses, I could ask the question, so what? Where does this get me? As I said at the start, Capra's work is stimulating and makes me ask many questions about what, if any, relevance it has to the front-line business of striving to get things done together. The world of NGO networks is riddled with complexities, egos, time-constraints, and ultimately, limited political influence to change anything at all. I guess in one sense it provides a rather cosy world-view into which we can 'fit'. It makes me, for one, feel at home, rather than visiting in the home and sitting on the uncomfortable sofa of those more positivist-influenced thinkers.

Mostly, I think, it encourages me to think beyond. It is really very challenging for me to even get close to understanding some of the stuff Capra writes about. But it also validates my desire to delve deeper into what it means for the way we organise our world. There is something here, something... that has to do with a way of organising that creates love. If we can be together in purpose, but freely individual; if we can act together, and by acting together mutually reinforce trusting relations; if we can resist the urge to control, and be prepared to stand firm on our principles; if we can allow another the space to arise, to be, and meet that other in their best view of themselves; if we can find this balance.....

SHE LIES THERE, THINKING, IMAGINING, WONDERING

END OF PART TWO

PART THREE

SCENE ONE: MADELINE IS SITTING AT THE COMPUTER, THE ARCHERS PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND. IT IS 2004, TWO YEARS SINCE THE END OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT FINISHED. SHE IS STRIVING TO REENTER THE MIND-SET REQUIRED TO FINISH HER DOCTORATE. SHE IS WRITING AN EMAIL TO JACK WHITEHEAD, AND ELEANOR LOHR, ENTITLED 'HELP'

From: Madeline Church
To: Jack Whitehead; Eleanor Lohr
Date: 17 August 2004
Subject: Help!

Hi both

Just having a complete panic, realised that I have to get my skates on and work on this monster, don't know what I am doing anymore. **I have forgotten what the point was...can anyone tell me why I am doing this?**

I know I need to get it finished, can't bear to have it hanging over me anymore. I just don't know how. I keep looking at all those olympians swimming and finding the energy and discipline and effort to get up at some ungodly hour of the morning and plunge in and thrash up and down, and care about making a milisecond of a difference in their times, and here I am, giving myself a headache in front of a computer screen, unable to switch my mind into any kind of productive gear at all. Jack would probably tell me to relax! I feel so relaxed that sleeping is very attractive. In fact I feel I lie down coming on right now.

And the clock ticks, and soon it will be September. When does my time run out on my fees?

In despairing admiration of those who can get to the end of anything.....

Love

Mad

SHE CLICKS ON SEND, SATISFIED WITH HER DESPAIR. THE ARCHERS THEME TUNE PLAYS HER OUT.

SCENE TWO: LATER SAME DAY. MADELINE IS TYPING FURIOUSLY. THE ONLY SOUND IS THE TINY TIPPITY-TAP OF THE KEYS, INTERRUPTED BY THE OCCASIONAL PLINK-PLUNK OF NEW EMAIL COMING IN TO HER INBOX AS SHE WORKS. SHE COMPLETES THE PARAGRAPH, SAVES HER WORK, AND ALLOWS HERSELF TO OPEN HER EMAIL. TWO NEW ONES HAVE ARRIVED.

EMAIL ONE

From: David Jackson
To: Madeline Church
Date: 17 August 2004
Subject: Use of your work

Madeline,

I have no idea whether this e-mail will find you – I am just following up a google search for your whereabouts.

I lead a national programme of school-to-school networks called Networked learning Communities. We currently have 130 NLCs, involving over 1,500 schools, and the work is beginning to influence national education policy to the extent that there is soon to be a Primary Strategy Learning Networks policy available to all primary schools – with funding to incentivise the early work. We have the role of preparing and designing materials to support the planning and implementation processes. In doing so, we are working with a number of international researchers and network activists to produce artefacts, tools, simulations and background theory pieces.

One of the things that we are doing is to produce accessible, practitioner-friendly versions of key theory pieces that might help to inform people's thinking. So far, everyone has agreed to us using their work in this way (Michael Fullan, Ann Lieberman, Priscilla Wohlstetter, Ben Levin, etc.) but you have proved very elusive to track down. (I believe that one of our team, **Gail MacDonald** may have connected with you some time ago, but then lost touch again.)

Anyway, the bottom line is two questions:

1. May we use a reduced version of the report, as attached
2. Are you working in the UK, and if so, might you be interested to do any work with us?

If this finds you, look forward to hearing from you.

David.

David Jackson
Strategic Director NLG
National College for School Leadership
Cranfield University Technology Park
Derwent House
University Way
Cranfield, Bedford
MK43 OAZ
web address: www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc

EMAIL TWO

From: Jack Whitehead
To: Madeline Church
Date: 17 August 2004
Subject: Refreshed from Bali to Despairing Admiration for Finishers!

On Tue, 17 Aug 2004, Madeline Church wrote:
> Just having a complete panic, realised that I have to get my skates on
> and work on this monster, don't know what I am doing anymore. I have
> forgotten what the point was...can anyone tell me why I am doing this?

You've always demonstrated an enquiring approach to life and so you continue with 'can anyone tell me why I am doing this?' Given the male history of telling women why they are doing what they are doing as well as what they should be doing, I've been trained by Joan (and painful negative reinforcers) not to do this!! I thought you were doing it because it's related to knowing yourself through and reflecting on your loving influence in the world as you have been making your contributions in different social/international contexts. These contributions have included your persistent enquiries into how improvements could be brought about. This has included the development of a process for evaluating networks. Enough to be going on with?

> In despairing admiration of those who can get to the end of anything.....

I haven't supervised a non-finisher yet - this could be a first - I could do my second thesis on the experience - would much prefer to see your thesis making a profound contribution to others' learning through its communication on the web!

Love Jack.

MADELINE VO - While this might seem a bit over-dramatic, this is exactly what happened. I had done what I so often do, and Jack perceptively picked up on. I had thrown out a question. Can anyone tell me why I am doing this?

The act of throwing out a call for help released energy in me to start work again from the front end of my thesis, thinking, crafting, rewriting. Jack was right at least about the persistent nature of my inquiries. Eleanor said to me the other day that what she sees me doing is constantly asking and re-asking the questions, and writing responses, until I get to some simplicity about what I want to say. Anyway, I was working hard when David and Jack's emails arrived, back in training, feeling like the task could be enjoyable.

The question is not a flippant one. It matters terribly to me to have some sense of the worth of what I am doing. **The 'why' of doing it is unbreakably connected to my values**. I have to believe I am contributing to the business of what Reason & Bradbury call 'human flourishing' (2001b, p. 1), with what Jack Whitehead calls 'loving influence' (personal emails), and what I call a kind of inspiration created through a mix of love and compassion, and passionate and righteous anger. **I want what I do with others to make a difference**.

The question somehow drew a response from the wider world, and allowed me to see how the work we had done had extended its influence in unpredictable ways. It appeared to have networked its way around the world.

I began to shuffle back through my email folder called 'Response from Others'

SHE OPENS A FOLDER IN OUTLOOK, IN WHICH THERE ARE OVER 20 MESSAGES

SHE CLICKS ON ONE FROM GAIL MCDONALD WHICH IS A YEAR OLD.

From: Gail McDonald
To: Madeline Church
Date: 20 June 2003
Subject: Networks paper

Dear Madeline

I work for the Networked Learning Group at the National College for School Leadership in the UK. As a group we have recently been reading your paper on "Participation, Relationships and Dynamic Change: New thinking on evaluating the work of international networks"
What you have found about the working and structures of networks is particularly interesting. Are you still involved in this area of work? It would be good to hear from you if you are.
Best wishes
Gail

MADELINE VO - Oh, I had forgotten about that email. I thought that trail had disappeared in the mist, but it has wound its way round again. I replied to David:

From: Madeline Church
To: David Jackson
Date: 19 August 2004
Subject: RE: use of your work

Dear David

Sorry to be so elusive, and glad that google picked up my whereabouts. When you change email addresses, and are not attached to an institution, it is very hard to be sure people know.

I wondered what had happened to Gail. Very good to hear from you. I will look at what you've done, and let you know. When is your time deadline?

I would be really interested in doing more work in the UK, and less overseas, and while I am I think someone with network expertise, I don't have any experience of the UK schools scene. But then you probably know that.

Lastly, I am about to submit my doctoral thesis, being supervised by Jack Whitehead in the Education Dept at University of Bath, and the work you refer to is a substantial part of that. I would very much like to use your email (as I have done several others) as part of my validation of the 'usefulness' of the research we did, as it was done with the intention of being used and modified and expanded upon. Would that be OK?

Looking forward to staying in better contact,

All the best

Madeline

MADELINE VO - I have to admit to being really chuffed. I took a look at the edited version of Working Paper 121 they wanted to publish, and began to wonder. I was struck by just how the work has penetrated into areas that I am not involved in, and know nothing about really. The names mentioned in this email are unknown to me, largely because I am not involved in schools or education. I did a google search of my own, and I find that Michael Fullan, Ann Lieberman, Priscilla Wohlstetter, and Ben Levin are thinkers and writers in the education field. It seems to be yet more data or evidence that indicates that my work has a kind of connecting quality, made possible by the incredible power of the internet and e-networking. Here I am again, stretching across worlds, linking into areas and 'social formations' and having an influence. Who would have thought that this work might end up as part of a set of materials being used as part of a Primary Strategy Learning Networks policy available to all primary schools? It makes me feel rather odd, unable to appreciate that others consider me to be someone who has produced a 'key theory piece'. I think Jack would say this counts as evidence of influence.

ANOTHER EMAIL PLINKS INTO THE IN-BOX. IT IS A REPLY FROM DAVID JACKSON

From David Jackson
To: Madeline Church
Date: 19 August 2004
Subject: RE: use of your work

Ah!

Good to hear from you. Thanks for replying.

Our date for an answer is whenever you can get back to us. As you will see from the Power Point slides, we have been citing your work with our networks for some time now, but we have not produced an artefact as yet. It has informed our thinking and has been used within other research that we have commissioned – I have attached an NFER commissioned piece which used it extensively. So, yes, please do quote me in your PhD submission. (I am envious. My EdD is in a state of terminal suspension, I fear. Life got in the way.)

For reasons that I have set out below, the creation of dynamic artefacts is a priority this year for our work. I have also attached a brief outline of the programme and its principles.

I will provide some basic background. The NLC programme has three core goals: the development of good networks; learning about 'networked learning'; and influencing the wider system. To begin with goal one was the priority, as without good networks there was nothing to learn, but the emphasis has shifted – more rapidly than we had anticipated – such that we need to re-orientate our work this year so that we can form representations of what we are learning through a programme of events and some smart artefacts and publications. The NLCs need increasingly to move towards being facilitated through the learning from these programme materials and from network-to-network support (rather than by direct facilitation from our team) and these same programme offerings, publications and artefacts can then also be made available to support the emerging DfES national policy agenda – which is promoting and funding networks.

We are simultaneously launching a series of publications entitled "*What Are We Learning About.....?* The first three titles will be "What are we learning about LEA support for school networks?", "What are we learning about establishing networks?" and "What are

we learning about the impact of networks?" Each issue will be a portmanteaux publication containing: think piece items from theory/research; case materials and vignettes; tools and artefacts; and data sets. The intended audience is system advocates and change agents, within or beyond our networks, the idea being to equip them to be able to work with others.

We have a team of facilitators, researchers and writers (full and part-time) who live all over the country. The whole team (30+ fieldworkers and 20+ core staff) have a two day team residential each month during which we process our learning, prioritise activity, strive for alignment and enjoy working together.

So, if the void in your life is huge after completing your PhD we should arrange to meet up to see whether we might be a congenial work environment. We have plenty that needs to be done. Let me know.

David.

David Jackson

MADELINE CLICKS EXCITEDLY ON THE ATTACHMENT

MADELINE VO - Oh, wow, he isn't joking when he says the NFER-commissioned piece really does use Working Paper 121 extensively, it's all over it. And it really captures some of the most important questions we were asking. I particularly like their appreciation of the network image, the threads, knots and nets, and their suggestion that what we did managed to capture the 'living feel' of a network. (Kerr *et al.,* 2003, p. 14)

SUDDENLY SHE OPENS ANOTHER FOLDER IN HER INBOX, AND OPENS A DIFFERENT MESSAGE

MADELINE - Actually, I got this message the other day too, from Terri Willard at IISD in Canada. I'm working with her on an evaluation for Priyanthi Fernando, one of the Action Research Group lot. By way of an aside she writes:

We have 12 interns from across Canada in town for their orientation/training before we send them out to work with the UN and various NGOs overseas for the next 6 months. This group is excellent - natural networkers - so it was a very fun day :-)

They liked the threads and knots analogies a lot.

- Terri

MADELINE VO - So, interns in Canada are also getting tied into the net, and they'll be out infiltrating the UN and NGOs in the next six months. What fun. All that conceptualising we had done may have been worth the struggle, brought clarity to others rather than greater confusion. This might actually mean something...

SHOT OF THE COMPUTER SCREEN DISSOLVES INTO

SCENE TWO: MADELINE IS ON HER HANDS AND KNEES ON THE FLOOR OF HER STUDY AT HOME. THERE ARE BOOKS, PHOTOS, CLIPFRAMES, CDS, POETRY ON THE WALLS. SHE IS SORTING THROUGH A PILE OF PRINTED EMAILS.

SHE LOOKS UP

MADELINE - Actually, his wasn't the first email of that kind I have received.

SHE SHUFFLES THROUGH A PILE, SEARCHING FOR A SET OF EMAILS STAPLED TOGETHER

MADELINE - About 18 months ago, I got this message out of the blue too. These guys have begun to use the ideas in doing evaluation with international networks.

SHE READS OUT LOUD

From: Ricardo Wilson-Grau
To: Madeline Church
Date: 15 April 2003
Subject: Thank you

Dear Madeline Church,

I am writing to express Martha Nuñez's and my appreciation for your report Participation, Relationships and Dynamic Change. Recently, we evaluated an international network and your document was extremely helpful to us in conceptualising the evaluation. So much so that we felt that the least we could do was extract the conceptual framework from our evaluation report and make it available to other practitioners. It is attached for your use and most critical comments. I am also sending a copy to Monitoring and Evaluation News, which was also a helpful source, especially to help us identify how little literature there is on evaluating international networks. If you have suggestions of others who may find our notes useful, please pass the attached document on, or give me their name and address and I will do so.

Best wishes and many thanks,

Ricardo Wilson-Grau

From: Madeline Church
To: Ricardo Wilson-Grau
Date: 28 April 2003
Subject: RE: Thank-you

Dear Ricardo and Martha

Thank you so much for your message, it really does seem worth the effort when the material is taken up and improved by others. I will take time to look at your framework more carefully, and would like to know more about how you worked on the evaluation. I have one to do in the summer and the more ideas about process the better. I would also really like the version in Spanish, if at all possible. As someone who has worked in Spanish for years, I have many colleagues in Colombia who I am sure would find it very useful.

Thanks again, and let's keep in touch,

Madeline

From: Ricardo Wilson-Grau

To: Madeline Church
Date: 28 April 2003
Subject: RE: Thank you

Dear Madeline,

You are most welcome. Attached is the Spanish version, which I should have sent the first time around.

Look forward to your most critical comments, in English or Spanish.

Many thanks again to you and your colleagues. It was path-breaking work.

Ricardo

SHE SITS BACK ON HER HEELS.

MADELINE - There was something utterly wonderful about receiving these messages too. For the same reason really. It was all worth it. Someone had actually USED it. This was after all the intention, that people should find it useful. More evidence that it had worked. It was also a marvellous add-on that they had done the framework in English and Spanish given my only other fluent tongue is Spanish. It was potentially useful for my colleagues in Colombia. Lastly, it was perfectly timed. I had just been asked to do an evaluation of a network in Sri Lanka, by someone who had heard about Working Paper 121 through the Institute of Development Research in Canada - more evidence, I guess, that the work is travelling, being read and used - and I could try out their framework. You can see it, by the way, and what we did with it, in Appendix III.

There are actually lots more emails, from Australia, Canada, Colombia, and the UK, from people interested and wanted to share ideas and know more. I am not a whole-hearted lover of the internet, but it does power things around, that's for sure.

Re-reading them all, I am struck by how influence works, in a world powered by new technology but still connected by personal networks.

SHE PULLS OUT AN EMAIL

MADELINE - Irene Guijt is a fellow doctoral student at Learning By Design in the Netherlands, who contacted me one day. I discovered she was a colleague of Rosie McGee's, someone I knew through my work on Colombia. Rosie was working at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, and had passed on the report to Irene. Irene then passed on my name to Waranoot, from the Development Fund in Norway

SHE PULLS OUT ANOTHER

MADELINE - and she contracted me to do the evaluation of the network in Sri Lanka. In that evaluation I used and adapted the framework Ricardo and Martha had constructed out of our research,

SHE WHIPS OUT THE FRAMEWORK AND WAVES IT

MADELINE - who had by chance written the framework in English and Spanish. I then passed on the Spanish-version of the framework to my friend Juan Manuel Bustillo, an old hand at coordination in Colombia.

SHE FISHES IN ANOTHER PILE

MADELINE - Then there's the Carpp community, Eleanor Lohr sent it to a client, Monica Vidal, with whom the Governance Project at Bath was working. Monica is doing a dissertation on evaluation of her network work in Camden, London.

SHE WAVES A SHEAF OF PAPERS

MADELINE - She contacted me, and we talked and I went to meet her work colleagues who all coordinate network-type structures, you can see more on that in Episode Two. Then her colleague sent me some materials which I then sent on to a woman who had contacted me way back at the beginning. And so it goes, round and round.

SHE GETS UP OFF THE FLOOR, HOLDING A LAST PAPER IN HER HAND. SHE LAUGHS.

MADELINE - Lastly, there's this message from Liz Capewell, another doctoral student, who I have met at several Carpp workshops

SHE READS ALOUD AGAIN, SMILING

> From: Liz Capewell
> To: Madeline Church
> Date: 12 December 2003
> Subject: Your paper
>
> Madeline,
> I've just been re-reading your paper on networking and wanted to let you know that I think it is superb. I've been an ardent networker in my time, but it has all been rather naturalistic (or do I mean haphazard!). I feel yours is a really important contribution and I'll use it in the future to bring a little more rigour to my attempts.
> Good luck and have a good Christmas
>
> Liz Capewell

MADELINE - I have to laugh, it doesn't feel at all rigorous to me. It all feels organic, and interconnected, and networked and shifting, and I see this image of the combination of new networking and old, impersonal technology firing personal contacts, and the impossibility of knowing where things will end up. But it appears to have influence.

SHE LOOKS AT THE QUOTATION IN LARGE FONT PRINTED OUT AND STUCK ON THE WALL OF HER STUDY

> *'The Atom is the past. The symbol of science for the next century is the dynamical Net. ...Whereas the Atom represents clean simplicity, the Net channels the* ***messy power of complexity..The only organization capable of nonprejudiced growth or unguided learning is a network.*** *All other topologies limit what can happen. A network swarm is all edges and therefore open ended any way you come at it. Indeed the network is the least structured organization that can be said to have any structure at all. ..In fact a plurality of*

truly divergent components can only remain coherent in a network. No other arrangement – chain, pyramid, tree, circle, hub – can contain true diversity working as a whole.' (Kevin Kelly, cited in footnote, Castells, 1996 p. 61. Emphasis added)

MADELINE - To go back to the Kelly quote, the way the research paper and the ideas it contains have moved around and returned feels just like the messy power of complexity and unguided growth. This is not structured, but organic growth. It has 'a living feel'. The work appears to go where it is desired and wanted, linked by threads of connection that loop and knot and weave, and continuously return.

END OF EPISODE ONE

WRITING INTERLUDE THREE

Questions and responses

Working onwards from the questions I posed at the beginning, it might serve now to see what the above might tell you about my questions. What information, responses, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and shapes are created by the writing? What threads have been spun, and more importantly, are you the reader still with me? Is the net of understanding too loose, or too full of holes for you still to be aloft with me?

Let me remind you of the questions.

Who am I? Who is this Madeline, are you any closer to the living, breathing person, do you sense the anger, the curiosity, the determination, the movement between worlds, the crafting of communities and the ability to connect?

What am I doing? Do you have a better understanding of what I do in the world, the work I do, the places I go to? I am hoping that you have a sense of the way I stretch across professional spheres, and have been able to follow my journeys in and out of Colombia, the Foreign Office, action research group meetings, workshops, and seen me 'at work' asking questions, creating networks, shape-changing, writing, thinking and talking.

Why am I doing these things? Can you grasp what the values are that hold me together, push me on, and seep through those porous boundaries into the work that I do? I want you to see how bullying has burrows under my skin, and how that plays out in the real world for me, how I'll take on those who control through bullying, and how love and art inspire me and speak to me, and allow me to continue to work transform my experiences?

What am I doing them for? Do you have a clear idea of what I want out of doing all this doing? How I cannot <u>but</u> invest my energy in contributing to the creation of a more humane and just world, through doing my bit to strengthen networks of connection and joint action? I have a sense that if we can find ways to allow the creative potential of individuals to flourish in loose community, then we might find we can create communities that flourish in sustainable ways, rather than at the expense of others.

How am I doing them? This is the hardest thing to show you, as Schon (1991) demonstrated so comprehensively in The Reflective Practitioner. We are largely at a loss when it comes to really exposing the innards of method. I have sought to give you insight through my own fumbling reflections, to see if I can't spot the important ways I work, at least the ones that seem to have inner consistency. I know that I cannot do anything very useful or interesting without the spark of connection with others, whether that is subtly, through embodied proximity, or explicitly, by doing things together. I know I work largely through questions, searching for responses rather than answers, and I reflect mainly via writing. It is this writing of lived experience that provides me with depth and meaning.

The last question that I am carrying with me as I write this is, **what am I learning?** In a sense this may be the only real question, as it is this that has forced me to sit down and

write these words. Making sense of what I know, explaining what I know, writing myself into knowledge, is one way of responding to this learning question.

At this stage it seems to me that all the work I have done in bringing mine and others' experience of network-working into a foreground of attention has its roots in my own personal trajectory of creating networks of support and creative interaction as the main community in my life. This understanding of 'Who am I and who am I with?' has come very slowly, almost ridiculously slowly considering how simple it is. My profound dislike of the sloppy conformity that communities are prone to, and which can lead to a demonisation of strange others, combines with my yearning to for an uncompromised place to belong, and I think I feel comfortable in networks because they allow profoundly different and individual worldviews to co-exist and co-create.

And in writing this account of my influence in the process of research, I have begun to understand that my reluctance to disclose myself, show myself, account for myself, which is a product of early life experience repeated and repeated, has in some way distorted my capacities and my potential for connection. This is me learning, and learning through writing as much as anything else. I have seen myself through these pages, and have noticed how hard I have had to work to maintain connection when the urge to hide is so powerful. The writing is revelatory; it somehow draws the blood to the surface, gets the pulse racing, and allows me greater vision and insight.

The work has been driven by a passion for social justice, fairness, and a desire to see love and art feature in our efforts to make the world more a beautiful and sustaining place to be. Despite my occasional doubts about the possibility that what I do will make a difference, I am determined to play a part in making the world a better, fairer, more beautiful and loving place for us all to live in. There is congruence for me, to use a term used by Maturana & Varela (1998), in doing this work in networks.

In a sense my ability to stay connected has been possible partly through an embodied engagement with others over which I have had limited control, and partly through simple bloody-minded doggedness, through knowing that without connection we are only partially alive.

My hope is that Episode One has given you the requisite evidence to show you that I try to integrate my values into my work at all times, and that I hold myself to account against these values intensively. It is intended to reveal how I work with my anger at injustice through doing work that is creative, generative, releasing of potential. I will stand alongside but resist joining, using my well-developed resistance to rigid community to find looser and more liberating ways of organising. This includes taking control of the criteria against which we want to judge ourselves and others to judge us. I think that this work is beginning to have an influence outside of my normal areas of practice, and the way the ideas seem to be spreading, through the use of new technology, indicates to me that the time is ripe for these kinds of questions to be asked.

In Episode Two, I want to dig deeper into the practice I have developed for myself as an evaluator and facilitator, as I think this will enable you a different entry point into how these standards I have created for myself find expression when I work. They are another way of working the threads of the knot.

EPISODE TWO:
FROM EVALUATION AS BULLYING TO EVALUATION AS INSPIRATION

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO OF A WOMAN IN A PICTURE FRAME FILLS THE SCREEN. SHE IS MID 20S, SHORT BOBBED SLIGHTLY UNTIDY HAIR, DARK KOHL MAKEUP ROUND HER EYES. WEARING A SLEEVELESS PALE SILK DRESS AND HIGH HEELED SHOES SHE HOLDS THE STANCE OF A BOXER, HER TWO FISTS CLENCHED IN FRONT OF HER AT CHEST LEVEL. ONE FOOT IS DIAGONALLY IN FRONT OF THE OTHER, HER DRESS HITCHED UP ON THE LEFT TO REVEAL A BARE KNEE.

MADELINE - There's that word again. **Bullying**. It keeps reappearing. Dyed in the wool. Just as it is always there as I construct my working world, so it is here.

I'm surprised you're not used to it by now; it's been around long enough

As I've been sitting here, my questions to myself are also still here, rolling around in my head.

Who am I? What am I doing? Why am I doing these things? What am I doing them for? How am I doing them? Who am I doing them with? What is going on here?

More importantly, can I let you in on what I think I know?

Well, you're going to have to try. Start with this, what is this Episode about?

MADELINE - Alright. This episode takes you inside the evaluation professional, the one who has to deliver on evaluation contracts, get a feel for a project, nose around and ask questions, facilitate meetings, hear and examine all perspectives, and give those who employ me a decent idea of what to do next. You should get to know Madeline - professional evaluator - and Madeline - professional facilitator, and see me striving to ensure that **the values that hold me together** can hold the work together too. What I want to do here is not to talk evaluation theory, nor facilitation theory, but add to the body of knowledge about what happens in practice, by examining my own. This means being forensic in my examination of **what I bring** when I am both evaluating and facilitating, exposing how **who I am and what I do** live and breathe within one another.

I'm not sure I know what you're talking about when you say 'how who I am and what I do live and breathe within one another.'

MADELINE - What I'm trying to get at are the real processes I work with, ones that tend to resist easy formulae or models, and that are challenging to describe. Borrowing from Gormley (2000) I am not interested so much in a 'biography' of my work but in capturing

the **lived, inhabited, embodied nature of my work**. Or borrowing from Helen Wyber (personal communication) and Saville Kushner (2000, p. 144), reveal the in-consistency, a kind of internal coherence in an inconsistent and shifting context, necessary to work in what Schon so aptly refers to as the swamp (1991, p. 42).

Look, my hunch is that the exposure of what really goes on, what the real processes are, will frighten people, indeed frightens us all, rubs our noses in the what we all really fear, which is that we are not entirely in control, and we do not know, and that we are all actually holding onto chaotic processes, constantly having to find a point of balance and clarity. That there is no technique, only the courage to keep asking the 'right' questions and hold the multiple responses in sight as we search for the simplicity that reflects, illuminates and to some extent explains the complexity.

So it's messy and confusing and really difficult to explain? Yeah but you have to try, it's no good you knowing it, that won't get you through this

MADELINE - I know. Over the last five years, I have written several pieces about the way I do my work, and the processes that I go through when I do it. It's tricky writing up this kind of thing, as it can be really boring, and the detail very difficult to bring to life when you need so much explanation of context. The nitty-gritty, often referred to as 'thick description', which is often the most interesting when you are navel-gazing, is almost impossible to communicate with anything resembling the vitality and thrill you had when first thought it, or tried it out. It all becomes about as appetising and tasty to others as a dead fish, or as Judi Marshall puts it, 'grey like overworked pastry' (2004, p. 15).

But tell the story you must, account for your learning you must, or you fail in this 'soft' business of action-research. I tell you, this work is anything but soft, it requires the rigour of understanding the significance of startling detail, wrestling with it, lining it up in a messy and changing context, finding the confidence to read how it fits with anything else, working out how to tell the story to others in a way that helps us to see. What Schon might call the artistry of wading through the swampy lowlands (1991, p. 42).

Yes, and you also know that you are determined to do something that is useful. This self-reflection business is not that interesting if it doesn't trigger off the resonating questions for others as well as for you. So, tell me first, how you got into the evaluation business, give me some context

MADELINE - Well, when I started this research, I wasn't working really as a paid evaluation professional. I was working in and with networks working on peace-building and human rights, for large UK NGOs and development agencies.

I had also spent four years as a facilitator for the Alternatives to Violence Project, known as AVP. AVP is run by volunteers, and takes the form of three experiential workshops on Alternatives to Violence. It operates both in prison, and in the wider community.

I came to AVP because I was sick of watching our ability as a human race to demonise others to such an extent that mass murder is possible. I sat in front of the unfolding news from Rwanda in early 1994, devastated, depressed, swamped by waves of killing, bloated bodies, mutilation, and thought, I simply must do something, I must put something of myself into **standing up, being counted**, refusing to countenance that this

can ever be anything but utterly destructive of the **connections and love** we need to live good lives.

Tell me a bit more about AVP. What drew you to it?

MADELINE - AVP is something that grows from the individual. It begins with me, with you. You start as a participant, and you stay one. The project has three levels of workshop. The first two are facilitated by others who have done the workshops, and who are unpaid, volunteers. The third prepares you to work in that team of three or four volunteer facilitators, who you may not have met before, to run a workshop for others.

But you never cease to be a participant. The organising centre of a workshop is a book of exercises, which we have experienced as participants and learn how to understand and handle as facilitators (See AVP Basic Manual). A team is made up of three or four to give breadth of experience and knowledge, and sufficient support for a large group and ourselves.

And what does AVP do, I mean, what is it trying to do?

MADELINE - One central idea is that we all have knowledge of alternatives to violence in our lives but that none of us are experts and all of us can learn from others. We come together as a group of equals intending to share ideas, help each other, and learn.

A second central idea is that we are all capable of good and right action, and that the way to develop our capacities to act with kindness and love is to focus on them and practice them. We have all used those alternatives many times, even those of us categorised as 'violent'. The emphasis is on alternatives, not violence. On the power of the positive, not an examination of the bad or negative. On something the workshop calls Transforming Power.

A third idea is that we must **make our community**, and **create connections** between those who are marginalised and those who live comfortably. The project has its origins in US prisons, and the Quaker practice of active non-violence, and I wanted to give my time to working with those who are imprisoned. I take the view that we are responsible as a community for the prisons we create, and we cannot simply 'dump our rubbish' into walled-in secure houses. We must make the effort to transform things.

Just a minute, is that the Transforming Power that Bill Torbert talks about?

MADELINE - No, it's a different take on the phrase Transforming Power. In my first workshop as a participant, it was rather mysterious, and knowing that the project has its roots in the Quaker / Friends community, I wondered if it was a disguised way of talking about God. It was the part of the workshop that made me queasy. It was difficult to communicate, to talk about. The workshop manual gave hints, suggested ways of speaking to it. But it was clear to me that if you hadn't got it, you couldn't really speak to it.

Over the years it is the part of the workshop that has become most important. One of the indicators for me that I have gone beyond technique and exercises and tools is my ability

to speak about this transforming power in ways that are absolutely mine. I know what it means. This is not the same as Torbert's transforming power in action inquiry.

It is a great phrase. Transforming power. It carries multiple meanings. The power to transform, and the transformation of power.

The power to transform. For me this means finding personal power to transform moments of potential violence, into relationships in which love and compassion find their feet and form. This power comes from within, and from an acknowledgement of the nature of connection with the other. It is located in the transforming power of love, understood by me as the connectedness that allows us to see beyond, into that good place we all have, however much our behaviour might show otherwise, and speak from it and to it. It is a power that transforms fear, often the well-spring of violence. And a power that transforms power relations, the what-happens between me and others. I repeat, this power comes from us, from the I and also from the we. It is not something I do alone, I cannot love alone. I must be connected, joined.

OK, so what has AVP got to do with you being an evaluator? What's the link?

MADELINE - Sorry, yes, this is where I met Mark Bitel. He was coordinating the AVP London Prisons project, and he encouraged me to become a facilitator. He then started a Masters in Evaluation, and suggested we do an evaluation of AVP.

We were very concerned that our work would be measured against recidivism rates, or indeed violent incident rates, in the prison population with whom we were working. Such criteria fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the AVP project. He got together a group of AVP volunteers, and we began a laborious process of **developing our own criteria** which we see as being appropriate to the work.

Mark has become a really pragmatic evaluator. He was then heavily influenced by Guba & Lincoln's (1989, 2001) work on fourth generation evaluation, and through my involvement with the AVP evaluation process, I joined him in his appreciation of **evaluation as a process of negotiated standards of judgement,** with and between participants, stakeholders, and evaluation professionals.

Hang on, what do you mean by 'evaluation as a process of negotiated standards of judgement'?

MADELINE - Well, we worked hard to understand what we wanted to be judged on, and we included in that process what the prisoners we worked with wanted it to be judged on. We designed our questionnaires and process accordingly. We developed a list of criteria we thought were important, then we interviewed prisoners and got them to prioritise the criteria they thought were important, and then because we couldn't all be present in the same room, when it came to coming to an agreement, between us we represented the prisoners' views, and advocated for them. Gradually we came to a consensus.

We were all learning as we went along and we spent many hours discussing, reading, refining, and understanding. Actually it was Mark who first said to me, 'you always ask the difficult questions, ones the rest of us would prefer to sweep under the carpet, or

skate over.' It is Mark I have to thank for bringing this to my attention and I have developed and inquired into my question-making practice as a result.

The AVP evaluation report was part of my application to join this doctorate programme (Bitel *et al.*, 1998), and Mark and I then worked together on the Action Research Project which is the subject of Episode One. In many ways the second process owes much to that first one.

That's great, I now have a better idea of what brought you here. So let's get a bit deeper into the work, **what kind of work do you actually do?**

MADELINE - Good question. In practical terms, evaluation in the field I work in may well not be recognisable as such by American evaluation schools, or even university-based public programme evaluation here in the UK, such as that Kushner does so regularly. Evaluation in the international development sector has its own dynamics. The professionals in this field are largely unconnected to public programme evaluation work, and most are not educationally-trained evaluators. Those who do the job are often people who have left active programme implementation work, like me, and who are hired because of their practical expertise, like me, or knowledge of context. Although we are contracted as evaluators, in the development sector people tend to use evaluation as a way of bringing in, or at least discussing, change. They are most interested in recommendations.

I am a newcomer, tho', and I tend to work on small contracts, evaluating small projects. I mostly get work through word of mouth. For instance, I have done two jobs this year: one evaluating five years of work done by a network in Sri Lanka; the other a joint peace promotion project in Latin America, bringing together a European government, five development agencies, and various local partners. The budgets are small and the complexities seem to be endless.

Actually in many ways I'm a reluctant evaluator. I resist descriptions of me as 'expert' or 'knowing', which tends to be a reason given for employing evaluators. My expertise is seen to be in complex joint working set-ups, and in peace / human rights / social change projects. So far my portfolio of work has some common factors: I am evaluating projects that are quite small in financial terms, and I do not do financial auditing; I am asked to work in conflict-areas in other parts of the world; the projects often involve coalitions of different actors at different levels; these different actors may well come from two or more different cultures and language groups; the projects' goals are political, social change goals that have **strong values at their core**. See what I mean.

I do, I do. Before we go on, can you explain what the bullying has to do with this? In your title you talk about evaluation as bullying, what do you mean by that?

MADELINE - Early on in the research, I identified my distaste for much that comes under the very loose heading 'evaluation'. This is quite a good explanation of what I mean, an early attempt at an abstract:

SHE PICKS UP HER NOTEBOOK AND READS OUT LOUD

This research stems from being bullied as a child, as a teenager, as an adult professional. This is where the urge to action comes from in me. It is the defining experience, the place where the energy lies.

I notice the way bullying is disguised as 'inspection' or 'measuring value-for-money' in the service of 'modernisation', carrying threats of budget cuts, closure, sackings. I see Chris Woodhead try to 'turn around failing schools' by shouting and imposing and bullying educators into better practice, I see social service professionals named and shamed, and I recall being made to stand on my chair at school for failing to eat my dinner.

This research is about using questions in the service of transformation. Questions are the tools of my trade: evaluation; mediation; consensus-building. The practice I seek to improve on. Questions open and expand our minds. Or they lock us into circular and reductive responses. They lie at the heart of inquiry. They hold power, world-views, they channel attitude. They open worlds or they blind us. They can be used to badger, interrogate, denigrate, and damage or they can be lovingly crafted in the service of transformation.

In this research I wish to show how my approach to evaluation – rooted in the values of respect, love, fairness and art – can inspire us to improve our own practice, reflect creatively on our work, in our work, to become connoisseurs, great learners, artists. In this way I use the energy released by my response to bullying in the service of transformation rather than confrontation or punishment.

The research is about how we can design criteria for evaluation that value growth and individuals and human complexity, which reveal subtlety and context, which inspire us to greater things. How we release the enabling, transformative and generative energy that comes through engaging people in the search for their own indicators of success, and through that search foster a dialogue about the impact of our work. A dialogue through which we all enhance the way we notice what we do and the effect we have on the world around us.

Abstract, first attempt
12th February 2001

MADELINE - In many ways my research focus has not changed, just become more refined, and at the same time more expansive. The core determination I have to hold myself **accountable** as an evaluator **to my values**, and to my belief that **inspiration and art** are more generative than problem-solving approaches, holds now as then.

Given that is where you start from, if you like, what influence does that then have on how you go about your work? What does it mean when you say 'I am an evaluator'?

MADELINE - Actually, Saville Kushner is one of the few evaluation writers I have come across who gets anywhere near what I think about myself in the work.

SHE OPENS KUSHNER'S BOOK AT A MARKED PAGE AND READS

MADELINE - Kushner describes an evaluator in the following way:

> *'Through a unique combination of an unusual mobility which the evaluator enjoys in moving between stakeholders, the unusual licence to ask questions of purpose and value, a training in or, at least, an unusual exposure to ethical issues, and an unusually privileged position of substantive impartiality, through the unique combination of these as part of the evaluator's warrant she has the opportunity to portray society and its programs from novel, or sometimes just multiple perspectives. Evaluation, at its best, sees programs in ways denied their participants.' (2000, p. 40).*

This definition, in its essence, holds for me a picture of myself in what I call my **shape-changing and embodied practice** of stretching across spaces, asking probing questions and seeking out the myriad perspectives that make up the complex whole of a project. This is what I do as an evaluator, just as I do when I am working as a network coordinator, a mediator, a facilitator or a political lobbyist.

I know that I have a facility for being alongside those I talk to, somehow I include them in my space, and that allows me to gain insight into their worlds in ways it is difficult to put into words. **That embodied understanding feeds my in-sight** (vision of the within of another) which I then hold in balance with my intellectual and creative capacities. My choice as an evaluator is increasingly to attempt to tell a complex story of many perspectives, and in the process of doing so, to test out with those I talk to, the assumptions I and they are making about the project and its influence. As an evaluator my intention is often to show those involved what they cannot see by virtue of their placement in a project. Maybe to give them the distance to see the inside.

This involves **examining the complex knot** of a piece of work, **holding onto threads**, following them, referencing back. Again I hear the 'ah yes!' in my mind as I read this description of Kushner's about the way he ranges across a piece of work. In my practice I, like Kushner, see evaluation concerning itself

> *'with all perspectives and aspects of program experience.' (p. 39)*

He seeks out the data trail

> *'backwards in time into peoples' life experiences; forward in time into educational outcomes; across the system to colleagues and their organization,' (p. 39)*

down the system and up it again. He tries as far as possible it seems to worm his way into the fabric of a programme, while at the same time holding on to a revealing, if fleeting, distance, allowing him to

> *'momentarily stand aside from society's praxis, and through acts of cognitive discipline, assume an impartial perspective.' (p. 27)*

Wow, that sounds very impressive, how does that work? How do you interview people, or design questionnaires that give you that spread?

MADELINE - I don't. I have found in my work that I tend toward conversation and dialogue as my prime ways of teasing out often complex issues. I tend to fail when I work with interview protocols, or a set of unchanging questions. I started thinking that this was methodological laxness, or failure on my part. Yet Kushner gives a stamp of approval to emergent methodology, insisting that you cannot learn how to do it other than by doing it and reflecting on it. He claims that an interview is a methodological mirror of the interviewer, that is, it reveals not only the interests of those being interviewed but the person who is interviewing.

> *'It is too limiting to characterize the interview as a strategy for asking questions – it has, rather, to be seen as a personalized instrument, an expression of how the interviewer sees the world – how, in fact, an interviewer values people and why.' (p. 83)*

He calls it his main methodological approach,

Wait a minute, a 'methodological mirror of the interviewer'?

MADELINE - yes, because it reflects his person, her values, his interests, it sort of defines not only her but the shape of the evaluative act she is undertaking. And while each act is new, there is consistency in the way she goes about it, and consistency in what is revealed by it. In a sense he is saying that you have to be in relationship with your interviewee and that way you will know what to bring into the conversation. That relationship will reveal to you what needs to be asked and known.

AGAIN SHE PICKS OUT A MARKED PAGE AND READS FROM THE BOOK

> *'The relationship between evaluator and program participant is one of dependency. The data the evaluator needs to generate extends beyond the descriptive and merely informative into the speculative, the judgemental – the metaphysical – and these are only accessible through interaction.' (p. 37)*

MADELINE - I see it as a kind of humility, and recognition that I must earn my access into peoples' thoughts, ideas and feelings. I am dogged in **pursuing uncomfortable questions**, but seek to do so in ways that do not make people reluctant, fearful, or resentful. I try to keep tick-boxing kinds of questions in check, and work with open questions that tend to be more revealing of the personal perspective of the interviewee. Throughout I test my assumptions and understanding, acknowledge my limitations, and remain humble about my ability to know.

This effort from Kushner to make a relationship with participants is not just a method, a way of getting respondents to relax and thus provide more meaningful data. It is at the heart of what he means by 'personalizing evaluation'.

Kushner's thesis is that we would learn something qualitatively different about public programming, and policy-making, if we chose to read programmes through those who cross in and out of them, rather than read the impact of a programme on categories of people, by working through the lens the programme has established. This is methodologically distinct because it needs to be in order to serve a broader political agenda of reading public interventions differently.

We would also place ourselves in a position to reveal more effectively the paradigm that such interventions are born from, and begin to question the rather utilitarian notion that evaluation is about making programmes work better through examining programmes, holding the programme as the main focus, without any reference really to the chaos and drama of people's real lives.

I'm not sure I've got the concept of personalising evaluation. Doesn't this just mean everything is subjective?

MADELINE - According to Kushner, programmes firstly box and capture people in defined places, through definitions such as teacher, pupil, end-user. Definitions that the 'described', at the receiving end, do not necessarily recognise as being primary definitions of themselves, and possibly neither like nor agree with. This is then how the evaluation is defined. You go round interviewing 20 end-users, rather than Brian, Sally, Deepa, or Alejandro etc. Their role as a 'pupil' or 'teacher' is what becomes important, because that is what is important to the programme. But this obscures the fact that benefiting from a programme is often a fleeting and inchoate experience in most people's –end users' – lives. They are only ever 'end-users' or 'pupils' in a programme's 'mind', not in their own. This way the programme itself becomes prioritised, and the people somehow are held to be accountable for the success of the programme, how effective the programme is in some way depends upon their playing their roles effectively. The programme subtly ceases to be accountable to those who access it. This is politically important, because it reflects our tendency toward social engineering in all projects, making people somehow fit into society in ways determined by public policy.

And this goes right back for me to the **suffocating norms of community again**. Kushner embraces, rather than erases, the danger and drama of the individual and their unique lives and it is this which excites me. It loops me back into the questions I wrestle with about the **individual in community**, about reclaiming vitality and originality and creativity which emerge through **holding the one and the many in relation to one another**. I am delighted, genuinely delighted to hear such an eloquently constructed argument in favour of working outwards from individuals when it comes to assessing the worth of programmes.

Can you give me something more tangible, an example or something?

MADELINE - OK, this bit of writing may help. When I first read his book I was on a train. And I was writing, of course.

SHE READS FROM HER NOTEBOOK AGAIN

> I'm on a train as I am writing this. I am conscious that I have deliberately avoided engaging with a woman who positively encourages me to sit next to her as I get on the train. Normally I get seduced by desire for contact, or am overwhelmed by the proximity of another, their desire to engage with me. Those porous boundaries again. I determinedly resist shape-changing today. She is sitting in front of me and has now managed to draw the man next to her into conversation about his work in the same way she would have done to me. He has been squeezed into talking. He works for Cadbury's and she is doing a PhD. He will talk, because she is insisting, asking questions, desperate for contact. We are

now on the flavour of Cadbury's products. It is impossible not to hear it, to listen to it. What would she make of your book, I wonder? I wonder if she would, like me, be nodding her head in agreement, thrilled to find the personal at the centre of academically-approved enquiry.

She is now talking about the isolation of her work: 'there is nobody there to ask me questions'. I would have asked her questions, I think, probably to avoid having to answer any myself. She is working on a Bengali dictionary; it has all been a strategy to open a space for her to speak long and passionately about her work. Isolation. I can't not listen. It is such a pull. She is entering the realm of the self, the private, the secret interior.

Now she starts confessing to her deepest fears. Her worries about looking after her ageing parents. This is pitted against her desire to leave the country. The chocolate man says he is 60, and suggests to her that maybe her parents don't want her to look after them. She is asking him to tell her what to do. Confessional. All personal history laid bare. It is an extraordinary conversation. It dips and swerves between desperate uncomfortable-ness on his part, his coughing, clearing his throat, too polite to tell her to shut up, and her eagerness to be a child.

So, this train woman, how might she 'evaluate' her journey home? On the dreadfulness of the rail network? The time it has taken her? The delays she has encountered? She might do if asked by the rail network to comment on service. But she might just as well 'evaluate' it on the opportunity she has grasped to talk out her fears with a captive audience, a complete stranger, only made possible because of the length of time we had to wait for the train to leave the station. If I ask her about a memorable rail journey, she might tell me about the off-loading she has done about her most important and un-containable fears, about the death of her parents and about her being trapped and witnessing their decline at close quarters. She might find that this unplanned moment has liberated her from her guilt, and allowed her to contemplate emigration or exile.

The point of this for me is that the responses we get as evaluators are extremely dependent on the questions we choose to ask, and the perspective we start from. It matters more than we can know in what frame people have encountered the things we are evaluating, and how their broader lives are panning out.

This woman's experience of this journey is unique, and very personal. As is mine. This space, this daily journey to and from London not only delivers me into a huge urban metropolis from a small country town, but provides me with a space to read, to write, to sleep, to look out of the window and practise mindful awareness, to talk to the occasional stranger, to read headlines on the Daily Mail and Telegraph (papers I would never buy through political conviction) to listen to others' conversations, to muse on the meanings of half-understood exchanges down telephone lines, to absorb the extraordinary differences and samenesses. It is much more than a vehicle, than transport. Does this kind of appreciation matter to those running the railways? It's hard to say.

For those running a programme, the programme takes up their working life. For those who encounter it, 'users', or in development terminology 'beneficiaries', the programme may

merge into or touch their lives only intermittently. They do not define themselves through it. This is how it is too for us network coordinators. We are paid to give all our attention to the network, who is participating, how they are interacting, what we are doing together, how it is working, what the relationships are like, and how we can mediate and transform the potential of conflicts. Yet those we call participants have broader lives and what they do with this network or that is only a tiny part of their existence, and almost certainly they interact with it in ways unimagined by those tied to the logic of programme design.

MADELINE - Kushner's approach to evaluation I think appeals to me most in its anti-universalising tendency. His emphasis on individual and personal experience rejects the latent authoritarianism present in the kind of program interventions which lump us all together in policy categories (pupil, poor, benefit claimant) and scrub out our idiosyncrasies and our individual potential. He claims that 'one challenge to authoritarian government is the undeniability of the individual concern – the requirement that policy take into account individual differences and the plurality of meaningfulness.' (p.41) This resonates beautifully with my determination to thread together a community in which we can all realise our potential and aspirations.

I think I understand that a little better. So when you say, I am an evaluator, you are carrying this picture of yourself into your work, giving a privileged voice to the perspective of those who in some way are the objects of attention in any programme. Does that mean you shove all the others into the background?

MADELINE - Ok, back to basics. This is the first question I ask myself when I start a job.

Who do I think I am?

The question intentionally has a double-meaning. It carries the inquiry that I always hold when I do a piece of evaluation work, held either consciously or not so consciously during the work. A kind of evaluation of myself. **Who am I in relation to this work?** I am all my professional experience rolled up, I am my values and my keenness to 'do good' I am a perceptive questioner, these kinds of things. It also carries the question I know occurs in the minds of those 'to be evaluated', and often in mine: Who does she think she is? What does she know? Who do I think I am? What can I possibly know about their world and work and commitment? The responses I have to the double question, who do I think I am?, who does she think she is?, interconnect in the set of **standards** I think I have **created for myself.**

Interesting, tell me about the standards

Look, it's a place of privilege, to be asked to poke your nose into the work of others. It needs to be held and worked from a value-base of appreciation, care, understanding and helpful critical insight. Maybe evaluation as I do it can be described as valuation [the act of valuing] – holding something, turning it, touching it, examining it, perusing its beauty and the effort that went into giving it form, feeling the craft in the many hands that made it, noting the flaws in shape and process, sensing what kind of another thing it could be if it could be remoulded - and valuation grounded in an ethical standpoint – that I am invited in to 'know' the work of others, and I must not be rude with such an invitation, but must act with care. I must also fulfil the real expectation of providing **thoughtful critical**

insight, the kind only an outsider can bring. My personal ethics mean that such insight must be communicated in such a way that it can be used to complement and motivate those doing the work to find news ways, other ways, sometimes better ways of doing more. My intention is to be **inspirational, not judgemental**.

While this is the first time I have expressed it like this, I believe I have begun to work more clearly with this framework in mind over the last year. I guess these are my quality controls, and I measure myself against them when I work as an evaluator. This connects to what Senge & Scharmer describe as the 'interior condition' of the intervenor. (2000, pp. 246-7) I hold these interior qualities as being those that affect the way I listen, question and make sense of the data I gather when I work. Judi Marshall states it like this.

> *'Looking inwards (which includes this life reflection and is far more than that) is essential to bringing attention to how I look outwards and act.' (Marshall, 2001, p. 439)*

The way I hold myself to account in this relates to the extent to which I manage to engage critically and inspire critical engagement in others. This phrase 'critical engagement' highlights the **difference between inspiration and judgement** for me. It suggests a keen eye on the issues at stake, and an engagement with what can be done by those who have to do the doing. I would feel that I had failed if my efforts resulted in 'critical dis-engagement', a failure to engage with the human striving at the heart of the work, and a rejection of the important reflections necessary for moving on. Evidence of this critical engagement for me is when my questions provoke not just critical responses, but ideas and energy for what to do next.

Yes, but isn't that just avoiding doing the difficult bit, which is criticising people, and making unpopular comments and recommendations?

MADELINE - Well, some of my motivation for working like this is that I do not want to be the enemy. I want to be felt to be an influence for good. I don't want to walk away with the 'who does she think she is?' question ringing in my ears from those who actually do the work. This may sound obvious to some, odd to others. I know there is a part of the very broad church that is the evaluation community who are committed to 'telling it like it is, warts and all.' In fact I believe that many people who hire others to do evaluations think that 'objective' really means 'critical'. Some may think that the very point of an evaluator is to be 'the enemy', to pass judgement. I however work from the premise that **my values will influence everything I do**. As such, I think my values are forces for good, and **I want them to influence the work I do.**

For instance, I am highly attuned to the traps of laying blame for failure. It may feel good, but it doesn't do much good. It makes some feel vindicated, but does little to generate possibilities for improvement or change. People get blinded by blame, deafened by it, brought up short and diminished by it. Those in 'the right' and those in 'the wrong'. Such certain slapping of responsibility for fuck-up makes all feel there are no escapes, and no redemption. I have seen this in my work as a mediator, how blaming others instead of communicating with them drags us deeper into a dark place. How did we become so determinedly unforgiving of human frailty?

Touché, good question. So, can you walk me through a piece of work, give me some idea about how all this gets done, put into practice?

MADELINE - I can try. I have a diary of a recent evaluation that I can cull snippets from to illustrate what I mean, if that will help.

OK, good.

MADELINE - On paper my work appears to be simple. I must read the background documents, talk to all the relevant people, visit the field, write a first draft, maybe run a feedback workshop, then submit a final report with conclusions and recommendations.

Firstly, I always ask those who have hired me what issues might be uppermost (they are usually not spelled out in the Terms of Reference, or TOR) and sometimes they tell me, sometimes not. I trawl what are largely dry written reports on progress for unspoken, hinted-at things.

After reading the documentation, I generally have a sense about what the main issues are. There might be something that I simply cannot get a grip on, however much I read the documents, and this 'something under the surface' will often turn out to be real, not just my inability to understand. I like to imagine this as me sensing what Stake calls the 'mood and mystery' of a programme, what Kushner believes to be a radical aspiration of evaluation (2000, p.36).

I start work with questions in mind, and a guideline for conversation, when I talk to relevant people. I don't have a questionnaire as such.

SHE READS A PIECE FROM THE DIARY

> DIARY OF AN EVALUATION
> Funnily enough the first person I interviewed in this piece of work started by telling me he was nervous. He had recently been sent a questionnaire for some other evaluation and it had taken him and a colleague six hours to fill in. When I told him how I intended to work, that I had questions in mind, and that if responses to those didn't emerge through our conversation, I would ask them directly, he relaxed and laughed. When he told me that he thought the programme I was evaluating had a tendency to be highly demanding of the time of people like him, and that he was mightily relieved it would not take six hours, I relaxed and laughed. This conversation had immediately thrown up a very important issue. He saw this as an unnecessarily demanding programme, and my presence there 'evaluating' it was yet more of his time demanded. I paid this serious attention. It affected the way I engaged with all others I talked to.

MADELINE - As I continue to hold interview-conversations with people, singly and in groups, the responses I get refine the questions in my mind. Very often the most important issues whoosh to the surface, and make themselves known very rapidly. As I hear and rehear the same issue formulated by different people, the question that prompts it begins to get refined. When I work, I always have an eye on the future, as most evaluation Terms of Reference are explicit in that they want a view of future

potential, and recommendations for further work. The refined questions are often designed to push people to formulate proposals from their critiques.

This comes, I think, from the belief that the way forward is in their hands not mine. A lot of the fear around evaluation seems to be connected to loss of control or ownership to an outsider, the 'who does she think she is?' question rears up here. What I think I can do is place the possibilities in a broader context, allowing all to see a larger more complex picture than they might otherwise. The **spaghetti, the many routes through** the story, is an image I hold in mind. Especially given the kinds of projects I am asked to work on, with their complicated relational and structural set-ups. This often requires me to help them negotiate, and to mediate.

SHE READS A SECOND EXCEPT

> DIARY OF AN EVALUATION
> Given the number of different actors, or players, in what is quite a small programme, I am going to have to do a bloody good job of negotiation and mediation if there is to be any future at all. A feedback workshop is sitting there inside the TOR, the purpose of which has never been entirely clear to me, and has got no clearer as I have got deeper in. First up it is partly high-jacked by the donors, who want it to serve another agenda. They're coming all the way across continents especially for this workshop, and my feeling is they want to bypass the programme managers and talk directly to those in the field. The programme managers want two separate workshops, precisely to avoid this. The local people will baulk at this, this programme is already 'over-demanding' of their time. I'm sure this is all intended to allow them to avoid taking on the central critical issue, by splitting things up. I get surer every day.

MADELINE - As I get deeper in, I begin to find myself working and reworking next stages, thinking and writing and planning and redoing, until I have a clear picture in my head of what will generate the best possibilities. During this time I tend to keep checking out my assumptions with a variety of stakeholders, asking them if my perceptions seem reasonable. Then I am likely to find myself needing to facilitate a meeting of sorts between those with serious interests not only in the programme, but in what I am likely to say in my report.

AGAIN SHE READS FROM THE DIARY

> DIARY OF AN EVALUATION
> Part of the task I have set for myself in this job is to make sure that the agenda that I design for the workshop has everyone's agreement, and will be held in a spirit in which I can place the very real and challenging questions that have emerged, and ensure that constructive debate can take place between the relevant actors. In this case I have had to ensure that I have at least talked to all parties before the workshop (despite the most demanding lot only arriving at 10pm the night before), explained my perceptions and outlined what I think is needed, made the necessary changes to enable all to feel the agenda reflects their concerns, and have a spoken commitment from all parties that the workshop will be a place to raise issues with a constructive view to the future. I often find I am working within the confines of a timetable that I have neither designed nor have

much control over, with people arriving and leaving at odd times, and I try to respect the working demands that interfere with my planning. This is no exception.

Sounds pretty challenging, like a lot of potential for serious arguments between people

MADELINE - I think I may be unusual in that as a facilitator I am pretty comfortable with the expectation of conflict in a workshop. My years of working in prisons, as a mediator, and with highly-charged teams of facilitators lead me to expect it, and I have no fear that things will ever get out of control. I really enjoy the real difficulty, mess and joy of human interaction, and am at home with improvising and responding in the moment to complex dynamics. That doesn't mean to say I always get the balance between order and freedom right.

SHE CHOOSES A LAST PIECE AND READS IT ALOUD

> DIARY OF AN EVALUATION
> I believe I made certain errors of judgement about the best way forward during the workshop itself. I held to a notion of how to proceed which held the conflict too tightly, or skirted it too widely. I was conscious that I didn't really know anyone quite well enough to give me confidence, but I should have trusted their abilities more. I am also aware as I work that there are four native languages present in the room, and varying degrees of fluency (I am working in both Spanish and English, translating at times for the English-speaking Germans, others are translating Spanish to German, still others a native language to Spanish) which can and do provide us with hilarious confusion at times.
>
> However, I get to where I want to in certain important areas. One is to make sure that all the people who have shared their perceptions with me see them reflected in the report back I give. This is vital, this seeing your-self in the whole, this knowing that what you have to offer is acknowledged. Two is to make sure that the contextual map we are working from is their map, not mine. I have drawn the map from all the information they have given me, and they make minor additions to it, but agree that it is an accurate reflection. Lastly, the serious conceptual disagreements about the programme, between the funders and the programme people, are clearly on the table, and the local people can see that this is being taken seriously. A meeting the following day allows relevant staff members in the middle of such disagreements to say clearly they will resign if these issues are not sorted out. And from what I understand, even before the report is written, they have set dates to work on sorting them out. The agenda remains in their hands, not mine.

That's really helpful, gives me a much clearer idea of how you work. I'm intrigued by the way you seem to really enjoy the possibility of a good row, or at least you don't seem fazed by the idea of people getting into conflict when you're facilitating. Can you give me a bit more background on that?

MADELINE - Funny that. It wasn't until I was reading Patricia Shaw's (2002) book that I realised that a significant part of the way I work is tied up with my theatre practice. She writes about discovering for herself the revealing nature of improvisation, the relational nature of drama, and the importance of responsiveness for the way things evolve.

This is the world I grew up in, learned my craft in. I most often worked with new plays, which required substantial amounts of improvisation. I was always at my most liberated and creative in improvisation. I felt natural in the skin of another, especially when complex human emotions were required, and unafraid of the in-the-moment responsiveness that is essential for improvisation to succeed.

Improvisation, which has resonances with what I do in my work, is sensing, being alive to the moment in front of you, and almost handing over your agency to the dynamic field created by the improvising ensemble. For me, what is helpful is being reminded of my love of being at the edge of chaos, which is what improvisation feels like, and recognising that part of what I used to see as my inability to 'stick to the plan', when facilitating or working as an evaluator, is really a commitment to working with the processes of human relating and interaction. It is the craft and artistry I developed while working as a professional actor that allows me now to **work with the chaos and conflict of human interaction with energy and passion**.

Shaw puts it nicely when she describes arts practitioners as having 'an acute sense of the paradox of being 'in charge but not in control", (2002, p. 117), a phrase that captures much of what I experience when doing evaluation work, and what I am striving to communicate here. This is not about power or direction but about a level of confidence in reading and responding to the contextual fabric.

Schon also talks about a kind of artistry in action.

> *'..in each case the practitioner gives an artistic performance. He responds to the complexity..in what seems like a simple, spontaneous way. His artistry is evident in his selective management of large amounts of information, his ability to spin out long lines of invention and inference, and his capacity to hold several ways of looking at things at once without disrupting the flow of inquiry'. (1991, p. 130)*

Most of all, however, I think that I **see myself as a participant in the process**. I believe I am employed because I speak, ask questions, offer opinions, and have some experience to offer. My preference as an evaluator is to work formatively, with the project, not parachuted in at the end of it. On the whole, this is because I am much more at home, more comfortable with the messier business of what Shaw calls the 'everyday life' (2002, p.145) of any given work, 'working as part of loose webs of relationship' (p.146) and understanding ambiguity, and changes over time from a position inside the conversation, not one who receives the narrative after the conversation is over.

This approach is much more akin to Shaw's temporally strung out conversation process rather than the 'workshop' approach described above, or any number of system change approaches (Open Space, Future Search, etc) It avoids the snapshot approach in which you look at a project in a three-week period live, making up the rest from documents and narratives. It is not like thinking systemically in the sense of attempting to 'bring the whole system into the room'. It is about paying attention to the process of change, the dynamics at play, rather than the written narrative of it, what Shaw calls 'responsively weaving stories' (2002, p. 149)

The truth is, I have never seen myself as a 'neutral' evaluator or facilitator when I work, and I do not seek to pretend I don't have opinions, or ideas. Again this mirrors Shaw's understanding of herself,

> *'I intentionally participate in the chat...I ask questions, voice opinions, make suggestions, interrupt people, show my responses.' (ibid., p. 151)*

In this sense I get over the 'Who does she think she is?' question, by explicitly identifying myself.

But from what I understand from what you say about yourself, you don't like to participate, to be in the group.

MADELINE - Yes, well, no, I mean, by participant I don't mean member. Like Shaw I might be in there, but I am also out here, **a part of the process, and apart from it**. Like Kushner (2000) I am critically distant while being emotionally proximate. Like being an actor, you're both the part and not the part. I am not sitting on the fence, I am stretched across it.

Ok, but what does this look like, how can you be participating in a group that you're facilitating?

MADELINE - This is how I see the facilitator-participant role that I so often take on. The facilitation of the AVP workshops demands that you hold everyone in mind, and most especially yourself. The workshop only has power if you open yourself, make yourself vulnerable, speak for yourself. You must be fully in, **and** hold the boundary steady for others. This is my embodiment of others at work.

The Action Research Group -I was **both participant and facilitator, in** yet reflecting **on**, actively helping us to broaden and narrow our objects of attention while bringing in my experience of working as a network coordinator.

Does that clarify things a bit?

Yes, let me see if I can summarise for you; make sure you're happy with the impression I have got of your work as an evaluator. Then there is space for you to add anything that you feel is important and we haven't yet covered. Is that alright?

MADELINE - Good luck! Rather you than me. Just to say, this practice, this valuing of the work of others, and participating in it through critical engagement, is what I have taught myself how to do. I began with an understanding of myself as someone who is ever-curious, sniffing out the things that don't quite add up, sensing the issues that can be surfaced with a decent inquiring question, helped by a peculiar connection to my context and environment that allows me to know something of my context through other senses.

Marshall's words for the way she works come somewhere near to what I know of my work

> *'I work with a multi-dimensional frame of knowing; acknowledging and connecting between intellectual, emotional, practical, intuitive, sensory, imaginal and more knowings.' (2001; p. 433)*

I understand what she means when she says of herself

> *'mostly my inquiring is a compelling aspect of being inquisitive, curious and open to testing self and others' (ibid., p. 434)*

Right, so this is what I have managed to pick up from our conversation. Firstly you got into this evaluation work because you were keen to spread a practice of evaluation as continually negotiated standards of judgement, criteria against which all those with a stake in a project wish it to be judged. In particular you wanted those often denied the opportunity to influence those criteria to have the chance to have some influence. You will often be dogged in seeking out the views of those who have least access or room to be heard. You are a reluctant evaluator, as you don't like to be seen as the enemy or to be judging the worth of others' work. What you can offer is critical insight, through critical engagement. As you work as an evaluator, you keep in mind the person, the individual, the person working for the project, the person interacting with the project, and yourself, as much as any institutional set up that is in place. You put your effort into trying to bring a whole complex picture together, guided by what presses to the fore, while acknowledging the inevitable limitations of your perspective. You seek to be a force for good, to be useful, to help people in their work.

You have developed a series of interconnected standards against which you test yourself, a sort of set of quality controls. These include constantly asking yourself to justify yourself against theses controls.

As a facilitator you see yourself as a participant in a wider improvised conversation, and are at ease with the often fiery and challenging dynamics of people in heated debate about things that they feel passionately about. You will prepare but not plan much, tending to work with the idea of being in charge but not in control. In this way you respect the dynamic and changing nature of human relations.

So, is there anything I've missed, or anything else you would like to add?

MADELINE - Well, yes, it's really more about where I go next I think, and the inquiry, the big question that is around for me at the moment when it comes to doing evaluation at all. There is a word that keeps returning as I do my work. It is spoken often and weaves

in and out of evaluation conversations, in workshops and meetings, in Terms of References and research findings.

'Accountability'

Whereas Judi Marshall will overtly state 'this is an inquiry for me' (2001, p. 435) about something like this, my tendency is to notice something that catches my attention, again and again, and start to begin to articulate what worries me about it. I will begin conversations with others, and see what happens. It often means I talk a lot, and ask difficult questions.

The question that has firmed up in my mind recently is: to what or to whom do I /we believe we are accountable?

This question allows me to begin from a different place when I do evaluation. If I wish to help people set their own standards of judgement, criteria against which they wish to be judged, then it is important to inquire into this question. The responses to this question may be many-layered, and may change as a piece of work progresses. I, for instance, ask this accountability question of my self when I work. One response is that I hold my values as one set of criteria: am I acting with compassion? Am I giving all those involved an opportunity to engage? Am I able to offer critical insight that allows people to sense better possibilities out of where they are now? Do I feel comfortable with how much I am being paid? Can I do what they want on less? Whose money is it? Could it be better spent? Am I being asked to say the things that others will not, things that others are not prepared to be accountable for? Is this appropriate?

In working with advocacy groups, or networks, the responses to the question highlight the changing and negotiated nature of the criteria for judgement about the worth of the work they do. Accountability to the donors or funders means one thing, accountability to the poor or the most threatened means another. Accountability to internal organisational values may mean something else, and maybe less defined, more assumed than explicit. Accountability to one's own values may conflict with some or all of the above.

I sense mostly that the negotiated nature of such criteria is not well understood. This may well be a product of the kinds of managerial systems that the sector has incorporated into its practice, and which tends to cloak its reality.

The most common experience for me is that a project will have defined its action under the following terms: Mission, aims, objectives, strategies and activities, for which it requires indicators and often impact assessment. Five year strategies are not uncommon. In conversation with those who are responsible for 'delivering' (another common term), there is often a confusion around these terms which emerge quite quickly, with a kind of haziness around what the difference is between aims and objectives, whether the mission is really a statement of values, what impact means. It becomes worse when indicators are demanded, as people do not readily understand and may confuse activities with indicators. There are many planning manuals in the development sector, many of which seek to clear up such confusion by inventing new ways of saying the same thing.

There are also many manuals that construct and present evaluation tools, using the above model as its starting framework. This is indeed what we thought we were doing in

the Action Research Group, looking for tools, and we put some together. I was very unsatisfied with that bit of the process, and I think now that is because none of this tells us much about to whom or to what we see ourselves as being accountable. It is mostly about what we will do and why, and how we might measure that 'what', but it leaves us without much guidance about how we understand the worth of our action, and how different actors in that accountability spectrum might understand its worth differently.

One way I am extending my influence as a result of the networks evaluation project is in this commitment to encouraging discussion and redefinition of the accountability question. I am really not interested in use of tools, but in holding conversations with people that get at this accountability question. This allows them to understand the range of people, values and process they feel accountable to. This notion of 'changing the conversation' (Shaw, 2002) is a really helpful one. The intention is that they can articulate that for themselves and be able to trace it, see it, articulate it and defend it in their working environments, something that tools do not do. It allows them to be the architects of their own standards of judgement, and the evidence they need to support their claims, not the implementers, or users of tools.

I can trace the effect this question is having on me and others in small ways. These are my reflections from four separate professional engagements during a two week period recently. They show me that the way I hold the question not only in my head, but openly in conversation with those I am working with, begins to affect my relations and the relations of others to their work.

> One – Meeting on NGO Management Practice
> I am sitting in a room full of people, come to hear the results of a five year research project into the development aid chain, and the effects of new management approaches. Tina and Jenny are people I respect. Tina came a couple of times to our Action Research Group and Jenny has had me in to talk about doing action research to her action research crew at Action Aid. I didn't realise the project had been going on so long.
>
> They presented their findings to a room of donors, NGOs, consultants, academics. The first finding, and possibly the most shocking one, was that almost no-one was prepared to be quoted. Everyone wanted anonymity in order to speak frankly. Particularly small African NGOs who depended on larger NGOs or northern governments for funding.
>
> I sat with a small group of other consultants and independent researchers, and mused over this fact. Another woman was also very disturbed by it. How is that in a sector supposed to be committed to equality, dignity in development, human rights, participation, partnership and empowerment, that people are too fearful or reluctant to be accountable for their views, or have internalised a practice of criticism without responsibility? As someone who prides herself on speaking out, I am really shocked by this widespread demand not to be counted. I suspect there is a subtle paternalism at work here, where small poor 'partners' will never criticise their paymasters, however much empowerment goes on. The donors simply have to acknowledge that their money puts them in a powerful position, and that projects that 'empower' people and don't change that aspect of things will not have a noticeable effect on such relations. There is also a political game at work. These partners are people who are prepared to take enormous risks in their own work and lives, to hold their own governments to account, to change vested economic and power relations in their

own contexts. For this they need money and resources. So the last people they want to upset are those who provide them with the resources to do their work. There is probably more pragmatism, less fear.

Anyway, I started thinking again about accountability. This was another finding. What effect what Tina and Jenny had dubbed 'the new managerialism', the log-frame, indicators, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation world of northern donor NGOs and governments, was having on accountability. They claim that such procedures have devolved accountability downwards, with partners having to use imposed inappropriate language and methods to account for their work, at the same time as rhetoric of partnership and empowerment is rampant. I started to talk about what I understood accountability to mean in our little group, most especially for me. I acknowledged that I get paid well for what I do, often out of programme or project budgets, but that I am contracted by donors. There are few quality standards, and often the Terms of Reference are poorly thought out, over-ambitious and undoable in the time or cost frame. I often ask myself the question 'to whom or what am I accountable here?' I tried to raise this as a real issue in the group, and listed some of the ways in which I hold myself to account, against my values, and my practice. Interestingly this little group of independents didn't seem that interested in critiquing their own practice, only that of others. In fact they were a bit self-satisfied for my liking.

Two – Meeting with Development Workers on Networks and Evaluation Tools

This accountability question seems to have been a bit of a feature this week. On Monday I went and talked to a group of network / forum workers. A client of Eleanor's, had been led by Eleanor to our research on networks and evaluation, and we had already had one long conversation about the tools in the report. I had begun to feel uncomfortable, as I am not much of a believer in tools, and certainly don't subscribe to the idea that we can just take them out of a 'tool-box' (very common language in training manuals in development practice) and use them. I don't see myself as a construction engineer, or fixer. I had tried to talk about the important questions we were asking ourselves about the nature of networks, and how you can look simply at some of the characteristics, and find ways of tracking what happens over time. When we ran out of time, I offered to go and speak to the group that she was hoping would use some of these evaluation tools.

I had spent the weekend reading Patricia Shaw's book, *Changing the Conversation in Organisations,* and had found myself gaining increasing confidence about my unique approach to working with evaluation and networks. I began to think about myself as someone with a facility for asking the 'right' questions in the moment, and as someone very comfortable 'being in charge but not in control' (p. 117). As someone very at home in the process of making conversation, and someone who gets a kick out of changing those conversations through asking probing and insightful questions. All very in tune with what Shaw does, although not the same. In fact mostly I was finding myself thinking, this validates what I do, this gives me the kind of validation I need.

Thus I went to my meeting with Monica's colleagues without a presentation, even though she wanted me to present tools. I did have an intention. One was to raise the question about 'to whom or to what do you feel accountable?', which is key if you are approaching

the topic of evaluation. It gives you a steer, tells you which criteria are most important when it comes to judging your work. Often in networks, this question is really complex, as while networks are the sum of their members, they are often funded by others (which is where the evaluation drive often comes from). But without criteria, you can have as many tools as you like, they don't do you much good.

Everyone came to the meeting with a pen and paper, and no-one wrote anything, except Monica. They all participated whole-heartedly in the discussion, and we highlighted main issues, looked at some interesting differences between networks, and some interesting practice.

One of the most interesting sections of the discussion was around what we mean by 'democracy' in networks, or democratic practice and decision-making. This took the form of a long discussion about accountability, participation, and representation, all vital aspects of the democracy question. Most of the people there said that very often those most concerned or interested with the loose organising topic of their Forums or Networks would be those who regularly put themselves forward to be representatives. Part of the conundrum is how to get those who aren't participating to participate in some way. Attempts to encourage nominations of others often fail to generate more interest. Few want to institute more formal membership and voting structures, as these are networks, not political parties, and membership is loose, non-binding.

Linda who coordinates the Network of Networks talked animatedly about the training they do for those being representatives. They place emphasis on the responsibilities being a representative entails, the way in which they must consult those they seek to represent, separating out personal opinion from more widespread consensus, and the way in which they are expected to feed-back to those they seek to represent. The intention here is for more vibrant accountability, a process that goes beyond elections and voting, and they provide a framework within which any representative is expected to work, so that all can be clear of the rules. I have been reflecting on this as a possible helpful procedure for the networks I have come across, who often start thinking in more formal 'representative democracy' terms when the tensions around inclusion and exclusion start to emerge.

Three – An international NGO

On Wednesday I had another job. I have been asked to help do a review of the last four years of the work of one team. Mainly this consists of interviewing a few external players. I was asked to participate in a morning's team meeting away from the office. I had received two-three page reviews from each of the staff, the afternoon before. Again, with the confidence I gained from reading Shaw's (2002) account of her learning to use her unique way of being and working in the world, I decided to do something loose, centred on a question or two, and a conversation. I asked one team member to start to tell me about a piece of their work that they felt reflected what was best about the work done by GAP, and the rest to listen out for claims they were making about their work, and the evidence marshalled to support the claims. We talked together for about ten minutes, and I delved deeper into the detail of their claims and the evidence as we talked. Then we split into threes and fours and had conversations around the same questions as others talked about a chosen piece of work. We then came back together, and people were invited to share

what issues had come up for them, again through the process of a conversation, rather than feedback.

Again I had gone in with some intentions. I wanted to move away from development managerial language around objectives, aims, indicators, etc. I thought it would free them to think. I used the language of the doctorate, and my supervisor, (claims, evidence, standards of judgement) simply as a way of shifting energy. I was and remain very keen for the team themselves to set the criteria and the questions that need to be asked about their work. In the final conversation core criteria against which they wanted to be judged emerged very clearly, and as they did I highlighted them, and underscored them as important. I also wanted the team to feel revitalised, and capable of defending their considerable expertise and output, instead of undermining it by sidelining much of it as 'process' work. I offered them ways in which they could use their own criteria to educate those who would otherwise judge them according to other criteria. Finally, I again raised the question about accountability, and had a very interesting response which illuminated how this team see their accountability line shift as work shifts from one context to another. When we all left, after having been fed lovely food by our Ethiopian hostess, we wandered off in groups to the tube. When we were all again huddled waiting for a train, it was clear people had continued the conversations, and were much energised. They said it had given them a lift, that they never talked like this in team meetings, they felt more confident. I had really enjoyed myself.

What I notice about my work here is that I am carrying a set of criteria against which I judge my influence. One is the desire to validate and appreciate the expertise, knowledge and good work that people are doing, and I find that engaging people in talk about what they do and how they do it gives them energy and confidence. Evaluators are so often considered to be experts in judging, something I resist, when what I see generally is people prepared to be very self-critical, very judgemental of themselves. They don't need my help to deepen that. Another is a commitment to opening up space for conversation, by asking different sorts of questions to those normally asked. This allows people to think differently, more deeply and more refreshingly about their work, and to test those thoughts out with others. I see my role as placing questions in the air, drawing attention to helpful responses to those questions, and how those responses might help to shift the thinking about the what, why and how of work. I see my function as an outsider to provide alternative framings, critical insight, and bring what are often subtle processes to the attention of those in them.

Four – Lunch with Pauline Wilson

I then went and talked to Pauline Wilson, who has been using the paper on networks to help guide her in her work with three social change networks. She said that what the paper had done was to help her to think clearly about the differences between networks and other organisational forms, and thus what we need to be paying attention to in terms of the process when we are evaluating. This she finds much more useful than tools, because it allows her an entry point into the work, from which she and they can find other ways of looking critically at the work done and the structure needed to get the work done. It also allowed her to see the kind of things networks might want to be judged against, rather than give her tools to use without understanding the real reason why we might do evaluation at all. She talked about a network she was working with who were in the throes of wrestling

with structure and form in order to respond to the inclusion – exclusion question. I told her about the Networks of Networks accountability practice, and she seems keen to know more. I must find out.

MADELINE - What's interesting about reading these notes is how the question keeps re-emerging, and how if I pay attention, in the same way Marshall (2001) does in her 'inquiry as life process' I begin to know how important it is to keep it in mind.

Sorry, and there is one other thing. Another aspect to this changing of conversations lies in the very language we use and choose to work in. In further reflecting on this relationship of tools to action, I am struck again by the way in which we have tied ourselves up in language that both obfuscates, and in some way determines the way we do our work.

Many who have talked to me over the last year or so will have had a conversation on this topic with me. I think it started with Tigre.

Tigre?

Tigre is one of my most treasured Colombian friends. The name means Tiger. I met him because the office had asked him to drive me around Bogotá one particularly stressful visit. He's a one-off, a true artistic spirit, with the political convictions only a Latin American of our generation can have. Someone who has gone through the romance of revolution, and come out believing in social transformation through more creative approaches. On our first meeting he told me about the video project he had done with street-dwellers in Bogotá, called '¿Porqué me tienes miedo?' (What makes you afraid of me?) He had street kids approaching passers by with a video camera, intent on engaging highly fearful Bogotanos in conversation about the nature of their fear. I was really touched by his utter faith in the power of human connectivity. He rides around in an old car, with the windows open, and talks to those who beg at the traffic lights. Most, including the majority of international development professionals and the UN staff in town, do exactly the opposite. They have drivers, blacked out windows. Locked doors are the norm. When I travel in rural Colombia, I feel safest with a nun, as they have the kind of moral authority in the regions the Army could only dream of. In Bogotá I like to be with Tigre, as he knows those, respects those, whom others ignore and fear. As such I have had the privilege to meet some fantastic people living in the poorest barrios of the city.

Over many years, we have talked about the language of development, and how that language influences the development of development. We have become more interested and animated by words which touch on and reveal the social fabric required to make any development sustainable. Love and compassion feature heavily, art and creativity too. We have started to look critically at the kind of project language we seem to be obliged to use.

The project language

Aims Objectives Targets Strategies Tactics Impact Strategic Allies

These are the words that most development projects and programmes are infused by. This includes the project proposal designed to provide breakfast and one meal a day to those forced from their homes by the strategies of war; the project intended to reconstruct the social fabric in a land shattered by the relentless polarising force of conflict and fear; the project determined to challenge powerlessness and poverty in terrain dominated by old-style caudillos, strongmen, military juntas. Yet these are words lifted wholesale from the logic of military planning, imported as so-called efficient planning processes, and have a hidden link to making any project more measurable, even 'evaluable' (a truly hideous invention of a word) and therefore somehow justifiable.

However, these are words that don't get discussed, are never, in my experience, up for discussion. The more I have thought about these words, and the way in which they are boxed into logistical frameworks, the more I have come to despise them. We all analyse and reanalyse the political environment, the complexities of organisation, and the planning model we will use, the outcomes we think we will achieve. The content, under the heading 'aim' or 'objective' is discussed and re-discussed, often revealing serious confusion about what the terms mean. Planning and evaluation manuals are full of explanations about what they mean, other words are often substituted to help people understand what they mean, but the use of the terms themselves is generalised.

I feel constrained by a kind of suffocating blanket of unquestioning conformity to such logic, and I want to 'do battle' with it. Interesting that I find it hard to come up with imagery that is not constrained by such logic.

People talk about strategies, tactics, they identify allies and enemies, targets and impact, and it all looks much like a war game. These are not just words. They carry meanings and to my mind the meanings are seriously at odds with what most of the people I know are involved in development for. I would argue that such words serve to obscure and often 'disappear' the real value base behind much of our work. If, as Maturana says, 'the names we give to what we see guides our doing,' (A day with Humberto Maturana, September 6 2004) then we are in serious trouble.

Words such as love, compassion, care, nurture, personal responsibility, talent, energy, art and creativity are rarely, if ever, seen or spoken, except in the bar or the informal spaces. Certainly not love. They are often the real motivating forces for people, but they are invisible.

In adopting this language, a project's aim has become to provide 'food security' for 'female-headed households', for instance. 'Food security' actually means having enough to eat and be healthy on over time, and to not be constantly scrabbling around for enough for the family. 'Female headed household' is mainly a single mother struggling on her own to work, pay the rent, look after her kids, etc. 'Female-headed household' is a social research description that no woman forced to move with her family to the city from her rural home because her husband has been tortured and disappeared, who may have been raped herself in the process, would ever use. Widow, rape victim, sad, tired, poor, these might be some of the words she would use, and might be some of the words which would help us to see the complexities more clearly. The categorisation depersonalises,

and in that depersonalisation we obscure and demean the experience, and we often cease to see it or hear it at all. Unlike the 'beneficiary' of the project. Her life is only too real to her.

When did we find ourselves so taken with the dream of military victory that we clutch such damaging language to our breasts, and beat our drums of victory over misery? Our log-frames of intervention are poor squares of cause and effect, where a leads to b and inevitably to c, where x creates y and we all trot along to the marching band. No deviation envisaged here, no invention or circularity and spiralling and whooshing back. All aims targets objectives strategies allies are marshalled in boxes for ticking and crossing. Here we go, step by step, no dancing freeform, no improvisation, no uncertain outcomes or curious play, no tentative claims, no humility, no fringed hula-hula skirts. Slim-line strategic-thinking gets the money.

In the middle of this polemic I come across van Manen's wise words.

> *'the language of objectives, aims, teacher expectations, intended learning outcomes, goals or ends in view is a language of hope out of which hope itself has been systematically purged.' (1997, p. 122).*

This resonates like a chiming bell for me. It calls to me, asks me to look again at my interest in love as a language that is missing from our work. He talks of 'hope' and it is this that I partially mean when I talk of love.

> *'To hope is to believe in possibilities. Therefore hope strengthens and builds.' (p. 123)*

He asks, 'how does "having measurable objectives" differ from "having hope"?' (*ibid.*) and answers himself in a similar way to the way I would: that the language of aims and expectations easily insinuates itself. Van Manen calls it 'degenerating' into a language of desire, want, prediction and certainty. I see what he means when I look at the 'unintended outcome' box. This box has been added on to the logical framework approach, to allow processes that are not measurable to be valued somewhere. That extra column in our log-frame is in some way a container for the human spirit of hope, fighting for space, determined to uncover, regenerate the idea that many things unintended are important, valuable, and meaningful to those who experience them. He suggests that the language of planning closes teachers to possibilities, to a broader view. This goes wider than teachers, I think.

He rightly places such language in the category of 'administrative convenience' (*ibid.*). But he calls out, alerts us to the way in which 'the administrative and the technological influences have penetrated into the very blood of our lifeworld.' (*ibid.*). His language suggests a poison, a replacement, a virus. It is that serious.

Kushner puts it like this:

> *'This is a society thoroughly imbued with the ideology of progress and political/scientific authority; saturated with inauthenticity through its intolerance of incompleteness. We live in a world where there is no longer a Plan B.' (2000, p. 32)*

His conclusion too is that possibility has been erased.

What would happen to our projects if we renamed, reworded our intentions? What might those other words be, and what effect would different words have on the project itself? If we were to ask questions of ourselves in our headings, and not just in our thinking, we might find that we start to talk about compassion and love and dignity and women struggling to make ends meet. We might also rediscover our political voice, something that has also been 'disappeared' as we have become more dependent on government funding and more reluctant to challenge the status quo. We might start to talk again about a radical commitment to changing the world order, and be upfront about it in the work we are doing. We might start talking about hope and love.

Tigre and I wanted to reword the project he was working in. He was responsible for a popular kitchen, providing meals for displaced kids – kids driven from their homes by political violence – who had pitched up with their families in the slums of the city. The project talked about nutrition, which meant calories and vitamins. It talked about food security, getting enough to eat every day. It was circumscribed by a desire to deliver food. And to report on how many meals were provided, how many kids fed.

Tigre had encouraged local women, part of the community to come and cook those meals, be around the canteen, teach the kids to wash up, decide on some things. The food used was leftovers from supermarkets, donated at the end of the day. They organised the menus, shared out the food. He knew that the love those women offered those kids was what made them eat the food (their mums often went without) and helped them to rediscover warmth rather than fear and abandonment. We talked about writing the word LOVE into the project. We talked about the evidence we would need to show this was important. He showed me a card from a very small boy made for Angela, the main kitchen person, for Mother's day. It said, thank you for your smile. I said 'that's evidence'. He told me about a young teenager who came to him crying, saying he had gone out and attacked and robbed someone, it was the only way he could provide for his family (dad drunk, mum disabled, kids too young). There's precious little you can do in such circumstances (no work, no welfare, no food). Tigre told me he gave the boy a big hug, and held him. The boy knew at least he wasn't alone. This too was evidence, I said.

It didn't go down too well with the donors, ironically a Colombian Catholic Church organisation. The organisation began to cut costs, and the way it did that was to contract out. The canteen was to get a delivery of ready made food every day in throw away containers, using plastic disposables. Gone were the laughs in the kitchen, the women helping the kids wash their plates and put them away, mopping the floor and talking about their lives. All in all it was cheaper. It also failed miserably, and has now gone, as has Tigre. He still spends his weekends up in the barrio, and I send him money to do things that help keep the love together. Theatre, books, places to meet, support for small travel costs, this type of thing.

The importance of the role of those women is the kind of thing that would probably fit into the unintended outcome box. I have always been suspicious of any planning model that needs to add on a last column for 'unintended outcomes', especially as such a column is often as full as any intended outcome box, and the one with the most interesting information in it. A model that has so much richness outside its framework is one that cannot be working very well. Such a framework tries, but clearly fails, to rule out

uncertainty, but its positivist logic of cause and effect requires us to label this an 'unintended outcome'. This is what evaluators are confronted with.

We are also confronted with a demand 'to demonstrate impact'. Sorry, I might be ranting a bit now, but impact is the word I think I dislike most, out of all of them. Again it is one derived from the military, and serves us ill in what is an uncertain business. If we were less arrogant in our frameworks, and more willing to accept that what we are largely doing is trying things out, then we might start asking more reasonable questions.

'What are we trying to change?' 'what are we going to try out as a way of changing things?', 'how might we do it, with what money and time and energy and talent?', 'who else has some energy and ideas and creativity who can help us, and who might stand in the way and why? And how will we know, can we know, what changes we are contributing to?' are questions that hold open the notion of possibility, and the truth that we cannot be sure of where our actions will lead. The words 'trying' and 'trying out' are more accurately what we are likely to be doing in a complex, changing environment full of the messy stuff of humans. They acknowledge the unknown, and the potential for learning. They acknowledge the frailty of our condition as acting subjects in a confusing web of inter-dependence. They expose the nonsense of insisting on SMART objectives (Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound), introduced into planning I believe to encourage us to think in realistic steps, efficiency and best value for money, but whose effect has been to contain, reduce, limit our dreams of how to make a better world. In the process all those words that express our human values have got lost, been erased.

Maybe we have taken our gusto for planning and mistaken it for control of outcome? I resist planning because it is hog-tied to this fantasy of control. Maybe we think because we plan this means we must know how to predict and control the effects of what we do? What makes us think we know, or makes us terrified of not knowing?

Kushner would argue that in some deep way we design our societies, and thus our social interventions, to prevent us from confronting our ultimate fear: mortality. He forces us to consider the paradox of how our desires to be perfect, effective, with perfect programs, is a way of avoiding the inevitability of death.

> *'The difficulty we have of confronting the reality that programs will most often fall short of their desired goals is partly conditioned by our reluctance to concede failure – which is itself a condition of a collective denial of mortality represented in that notion of 'social death'.' (2000, p.26)*

This is somehow translated by all of us into a notion of protecting and engineering society, the place we have constructed within which to feel safe, protected from death. Kushner quotes Dollimore, suggesting that fear of failure simply encourages greater desire for social control, something that feels live as we live through New Labour's obsession with targets, curbing anti-social behaviour, which indeed shows us that they 'fear that society is endangered.'

> *'Social programs are vehicles for the cooption of people into ideal, even utopian, political states, that is, states which too often represent the denial of complexity and shortfall.' (2000, p. 26)*

This means for me, as an evaluator intent on bringing to the fore the complex nature of work done to advance what Reason & Bradbury call 'human flourishing' (2001b, p. 1), that I am operating inside a deadening framework.

Van Manen's most profound insight is that all this encourages or leads us to see 'the past as present and the present as past.' (1997, p. 123). Does he mean by this that this kind of language encourages us to a process of constant evaluation, seeing the present through the eyes of what has been, with the past ever-present as an ethereal presence, while at the same time living the present in the past, as a constant projection, with our attention on what our greater goal might be, a triple-jumping over the present?

Most distressingly, van Manen outlines the danger of constantly evaluating and striving for change.

> *'inherent in such living ..is the danger of always treating the present as burden, as something that must be overcome. There is little dwelling in such living.' (1997, p. 123).*

Maybe this is the crux of it for me, the reason why I am such a reluctant evaluator? I think the present is where we co-create life and community together. It is in the present that we are alive and acting.

END OF EPISODE TWO

Writing Interlude Four

Question and response, stuck in the mire of 'writing up'

When it comes to making sense in the written form, I know several stages occur. I put all the things I have on the page and give myself hints and headings about what they might mean. I move them around, regroup them, lose them, find them again. I glimpse something, something telling, and when I do, what I write becomes as clear and interesting and complex and simple as a piece of music. Then I fill in around it with the boring tedium of report language. The sentences get overlong and dry as old toast. I sink gradually into a sort of mushy, murky place, without inspiration or light. Then I stop. Pull out.

I read an unrelated book, or listen to a drama on the radio, or swim.

Then another beautiful moment of understanding and appreciation happens. Something sparks, I whiz down a connecting hyphen, and I can see where to start again. I return and write like an angel. I know what all those books about writing mean when they talk about taking flight. I make a plan, I introduce a structure, I start numbering, and heading.....then the light goes out once more, and I grope, flail, make words appear, write tosh. I think it's something to do with introducing order before it's ready to be ordered.

Suddenly I might remember, an earlier thought, a clear place. I go back to it and the rush begins again. At this point I will probably find that I have forgotten to breathe, and my head will feel faint and light-heavy. These moments of passionate, 'got-it' writing are the places of real understanding and learning and they rustle against the skin like an expensive shirt. Thrilling, luxurious and momentary.

At this point, what do I have?

Mush and crispy bits, a sort of lurching journey through doughy, chewy, unreadably tedious slops, interspersed with lovely flavours and sensuous smells. There are the 'Paragraphs 1.1.1' and the 'It can be saids' and the 'In conclusion we might says' interrupted by whooshes and spurts of glorious, brimming language bursts that reach into my heart and mind and find that oh yes button, that G spot of truth or understanding, and I can feel it like the zing of harmonics on a newly-tuned guitar.

I look closely. It's a mess. I have to do something else, be somewhere else, be someone else. Reordering just gets me another wrong size. My friend tells me the line between writing up and throwing up is very fine indeed. This is the nearest I get to slumping despair.

At what feels like the very last moment before the deadline, I hit the place where I've got the signal. It all makes as much sense as it is ever going to with this amount of information and data. I take what there is and I re-write, tighten, explode paragraphs, surgically remove the living core, and the whole surging mass begins to take on spare, beautiful form, has an

armature, limbs, flourishes of décor, colour and breath. And it will be as done as it can be, without starting from a totally different time and place and person.

This, if I slow my heart rate down and think again, is how I unravel, re-string and pattern just about all my learning. This is how my mind, heart and instinct work together in all my inquiring efforts. This is the process I go through every time I start here, with this question, this piece of work, this report, this emotional tangle, and want to end up somewhere else. This, oh yes, is the way it always goes. A draw, an urging, a something strange, mush and slops and tasteless junk, light and dazzlement and shortness of breath, plunging, sleeping, groping and slipping, then a kind of spare, simple clarity. It's a painful and colourful and extreme process that eventually, and seemingly impossibly, always gets there in the end, and within more or less the required time-frame. And then it all begins anew.

Phew.

I wrote this about the struggle that I was going through in writing up an evaluation report after my visit to Sri Lanka to evaluate the work of an environmental network / movement. I wanted to get something down that I recognised as the real process that I go through to get out the other end. I've put it in here because I want to reveal just how coherent and messy my processes are, and how 'writing up' is a process that includes much not knowing, desperation, creative flux, sensing, and in some real sense tracing the very tied up and complex threaded nature of any project. Action, people, context, reaction, resources, time and history all interconnect, affect and are affected by each other.

In the writing of this I learned that this process has some form. It tends to follow a pattern, which I forget about when I'm in it, especially when I am reaching 'slumping despair.' But actually, I go through this process every time I have to start from one end of writing up and arrive at another in any piece of paid evaluation work. Jack Whitehead might formulate this differently. He has a helpful way of talking about data records, the totality of the data that you have collected, out of which you choose evidence, which you then present. I think it is the process of being able to see, sense, feel and inhabit the evidence that seems to take me so much time.

You would probably never know this was going on when you read the 'final product'. A quick skim through Working Paper 121 would tell you nothing of the drama of creation that went into it. There is simplicity in the text that was very challenging to reach. This may seem overdramatic, especially when talking about evaluation reports, when this is often deemed simply to be 'writing up'. But I know in my bones what van Manen is describing in words when he reports how his students experience phenomenological writing,

> *'the writing remains painful, difficult, disorienting. More than once seminar participants told me that the words just would not come; it was like trying to find their way through darkness; a strange solitary experience, like writing in the dark.' (2002, p. 2)*

This may be because it is a highly attuned reflective process when it is working well. It connects us to ourselves and the subject of our inquiry by externalising some inner meaning.

> *'Writing fixes thought on paper. It externalises what in some sense is internal; it distances us from our immediate lived involvements with the things of our world.' (van Manen, 1997, p. 125)*

At the same time subtle forces are working upon us. In my case I think this is because it allows me the distance from myself that writing provides, while at the same time operating in a space (temporal, physical) that seems utterly connected. van Manen puts it like this:

> *'A peculiar change takes place in the person who starts to write and enters the text: the self retreats or steps back as it were, without completely stepping out of its social, historical, biographic being.' (2002, p. 3).*

He describes a process in which the writer writing is no longer quite the same self.

Writing the end

> *'The writer, in writing, seems no longer quite this or that personal self.' (van Manen, 2002, p. 3)*

The writer writing is no longer quite the same self. Hmm. This is not a bad place to start to begin to wrap up. I sense I am reaching the end, and I must draw some conclusions. The net is nearly made.

Breathing out and breathing in and breathing out and...

Breathing – connection and disconnection

The last thread in the complex experience I have of being both 'in' and 'out', connected and disconnected has come to the surface while practicing yoga over the last two years. You could probably call it the first thread, as it is the stuff of life itself.

Breath has become something I hold in mind, and in practising and reading about yoga, the breath has offered revelatory insights. Reading Heinz Grill's Harmony in Breathing (1996) , a seam of self-knowledge revealed itself to me.

On **breathing in**:

> *'one connects more intensively with one's surroundings; breathes oneself into one's environment. Inhaling leads to coming closer, to deeper connection with the environment.' (Grill, 1996, p. 17)*

On **breathing out**:

> *'signifies letting go, withdrawing, rejection. With the shrinking of the ribcage man lets go of the outer and seeks distance. He withdraws from his environment, detaches himself from the sphere, just as with inhalation he actively connects himself with the sphere.' (ibid.)*

I sense I have always been keener on the breathing out, the withdrawal, the disconnection, at least at the level of my body, than the breathing-in connection. I find myself not breathing freely, almost holding my breath for long periods. Then I have to take a big struggling breath in, and sigh it out. When in a state of tension I forget to breathe and have to be told. When I sleep people have said that they worry I am dead, as they cannot discern any breathing at all.

This morning in yoga, we did an exercise called yoga mudra, in which you breathe out as you bend in a bowing motion to place the forehead on the floor, and then wait in the pause between the out-breath and the in-breath, before rising again with the in-breath.

This pause in-between is something to do with leaving the old behind but pausing before moving into the new. It is a moment of consciousness, stillness. It is a familiar place physically for me to be in, as I say above, I regularly stop breathing. But in my normal state, that is a dead space. It is where nothing happens and I drift into a disconnected nowhere-land. When actively doing the exercise this morning I was struck with the

thought that I fill my life with breathlessness, and may therefore constantly be on the edge of panic. Panic is not a sensation that I necessarily recognise, I don't feel on the edge all the time. But something I've noticed since giving up my Colombia job is that when I now travel on the tube or ride the bike or set up a meeting, I have more space, and I see how little space is really allowed for most of us.

I think again about Fritjof Capra and the notion of 'equilibrium'. This does not, in scientific terms, mean **balance**. It means that there is effectively nothing happening, that there are no processes at work. It means dead, if we take life to mean a continual flow of resources, energy, feedback loops, production and creative transformation, as Capra does.

> *'a living organism is characterised by continual flow and change in its metabolism, involving thousands of chemical reactions. Chemical and thermal equilibrium exists when all these processes come to a halt. In other words, an organism in equilibrium is a dead organism. Living organisms continually maintain themselves in a state far from equilibrium, which is the state of life. Although very different from equilibrium, this state is nevertheless stable over long periods of time..' (Capra, 1996, p. 175-6)*

This all feels rather contradictory, the words 'dead' and 'breathlessness' tend to give us very different meanings, one unmoving, the other fluttering and nervous and on the edge. Yet if breath is what keeps us living then breathlessness is indeed death. So here I am, dead between breaths, in a kind of stable state, of equilibrium. My yoga teacher says that for her that not-breathing state was and is a way of not allowing herself to feel, through sheer terror of what feelings might feel like.

Breathing out

If **breathing-in is a route to intensive connection**, to being in touch with one's environment, then it strikes me that I used to have that intensive connection, a connection so intense it was almost overwhelming. I think that smoking for me is a way of disconnecting from the breath of life, in this meaning of connection, and I am fairly sure that I started smoking to disconnect from the pain of overwhelming connection with my first real experience of betrayal. It is no accident that I smoke more heavily when in Colombia for instance, a place that is painful to be in and requires great strength to hang on to possibilities of love.

I have talked about this at length with my friend Alice who is more like me than anyone I know. We have both dedicated our lives to living in other people's pain and sorrow, to working for justice for the most violently abused, to working in the most extreme environments. She says someone recently asked her if she ever breathed at all, as he could not see it. It's as if we place ourselves in the most extreme places, and expose ourselves to the most hideous expressions of violence, as a way of forcing connection for ourselves. Only through closeness to such barbarity can we experience the world. This is indeed a terrifying thought. Breathing in would be easier, and maybe bring us closer to love.

Breathing In

Alice, James and I are drinking wine, swinging in hammocks on James' terrace in the countryside outside Bogotá. Alice talks about how the violence of Colombia is destroying

her soul. I talk about the fierce fiery knot that forms in my guts as I land in Bogotá airport, and that does not leave me till I return to my home. This knot is accompanied by other sensory circles. Of smells. Of palpable fear. Of body odours rank with lack of trust. We delve into each others' Colombia worlds. I make a vow to myself that I will send Alice poetry. Any poetry. At least once a week. We email each other a lot, for work purposes. I promise myself that I will love her through art. It feels like a gigantic art-full effort simply to think of it.

James talks about his neighbour. Oliveiros is a horse man, he loves horses and he keeps them. They are beautifully wild. Recently he offered water to some thirsty horses, horses carrying police in their duties. In the current climate, we despair, it wouldn't take much for someone to take that careful and loving action and construe it as collaboration with the enemy, action worthy of punishment. We are in a civil war, we say, which is not civil at all.

Our feelings in our little holiday encompass almost complete impotence and tiredness in the face of the cruelty, the hate and the wilful destructiveness we are witness to, something that clashes with the natural beauty of the place around us. Alice says she can't let the beauty in or it will pierce her, wound her, open the floodgates, expose the nerves and fray her bones. I am sick of the anger, the polarisation, the loss of anything touching.

When I return from Colombia two weeks later, I re-read bits of my notebook. Then I write this poem for Alice and James. It is an act of love.

Colombian Air

On landing it rises, sweet fruit to dust
and metal. The smell spreads
upwards, inwards, near;
I feel the rush, the urgency of fear full-gutted.
Heart-song rusts.

This is a country full of pain,
diminished, desperate, in love again
with answers scarred in graves, on walls,
buzzing in the chains
of saws.

There is no ease
in offering to water the passing horses
of police, when care for beasts
makes you the enemy of other men.

We are the alchemists. Too few
too frail,
too spent to sweeten with smiles the scent
that trails on morning mists.

Madeline Church
12th May 2000

Breathing out

> *'the etymological roots of 'soul' and 'spirit' mean breath in many antique languages. The words for 'soul' in Sanskrit (atman), Greek (psyche) and Latin (anima) all mean 'breath'. The same is true for the word for 'spirit' in Latin (spiritus), in Greek (pnuema), and in Hebrew (ruah). These too, mean 'breath'.' (Capra, 1996, p. 257)*

What this means about soul or spirit in my particular case needs greater reflection. If I am resisting breathing- in, and relieved by breathing-out, what is going on? My soul-breath, my spirit-breath is distorted, hunched, defensive, rejecting, seeking greater distance. Again this feels like it is connected to that early experience, when connection was too painful and smoking released me from the pressure on my soul. It is also clear to me that giving up smoking for good will be a significant shift for me, and I feel it approaching with some fear. Which is why I am seeking the helping energy of breath, inching my way to embracing the positive connective possibilities of breathing in with relaxed vigour, instead of smoking.

Breathing In

My thought for myself is that maybe I cannot learn to love until I find a way to breathe-in freely.

There is a phrase that is working away within me, one again from Grill's Harmony in Breathing, which is

> *Love in the inner creates movement in the outer (1996, p. 11)*

It is linked to my understanding of connection, and the relationship between my inner being and my presence in the world, or sphere.

> *'Through love we are inwardly connected with all beings.' (ibid., p. 11-12)*

This is a route to working with the breath for me, to extending my capacity for breathing-in, one might call it the breath of love. If I can let the world in through my breath, and reconnect to it, then my capacity for love will be enhanced. This I sense will be transforming for me. Rayner, in his work with Aburrow, sees great possibilities for moving beyond conflictive relationships if we can only rethink our notions of our boundaries to our environment:

> *'When space and boundaries are seen ..as connective and coupling rather than distancing and dislocating, the tendency for conflict with objective other is superseded by acceptance of the necessary togetherness of inner with outer in complementary relationship, each 'breathing space' from and into the other. This relationship necessarily embodies light and dark, constructive and destructive processes as the source of creativity, renewal and diversity in our living space. It feeds life with death. But the conflict that arises from the inverted perspective of our human objective detachment from nature*

feeds death with life. Perhaps if we can restore our sense of immersion in a space that permeates around through and within our complex selves, we can feel our way beyond the abstractive logic of conflict.' (Rayner & Aburrow, 2003)

Maturana & Varela (1998) have come to 'a biology of love' as an explanation of the way living systems conserve each other, and mould each other over time. In the Tree of Knowledge they conclude that 'biologically, without love, without acceptance of others, there is no social phenomenon.' (p. 247) There is a biological necessity for us, if we are to express our humanness, to 'see the other person and open up for him room for existence beside us' (p. 246) and 'accept the other person beside us in our daily living' (*ibid.*).

'This is the biological foundation of social phenomena: without love, there is no social process and, therefore, no humanness.' (p. 246)

This may well be written in our bones.

Breathing out

In the meantime, I use my voice to talk about love, as I have always used my voice as my centre. This voice is a powerful characteristic of mine; it is something that expresses an essence of me. My voice is unmistakable people say. They recognise me through my voice.

I have taken to saying the word LOVE out loud when in meetings about evaluation or about projects. Peoples eyes light up and they gasp as if I have just said I am a Martian. Then people start to flutter, and their hearts beat hard, their palms sweat a little and a little sensual rush flits round the room, and they begin to tell stories and uncover something that they had forgotten. LOVE. They talk about why they wanted to do this work, and their big dreams of making the world a better place burst from their pent up breasts, and they begin to gush and gust and garble and shudder nervously as if touched by a strange and affecting hand. LOVE.

I say I believe in the transforming power of LOVE.

Yet speaking is also part of the defence against breathing in and the world. My voice speaks and speaking is about breathing out. Making connection through withdrawal and rejection and defence? How strange and paradoxical. I breathe out all my energy, and all my energy is spent on withdrawal, so my struggle to stay connected is all the more intense.

Breathing in

Louise Bourgeois Exhibition, Louisiana Museum, Denmark, 19/6/03

I am in Copenhagen doing a job. I no longer work for the ABColombia Group, I've gone freelance. I take a day extra and travel by train north along the coast a while to a seaside museum. I am determined to get some art in on this trip.

All I have seen of Louise Bourgeois in the past is her enormous spider in the Turbine Hall in the Tate Modern, the first commission to fill that space. I wasn't that taken with the spider. There is another in a square in Copenhagen.

Once inside the exhibition, I am suddenly overcome with connections. I walk round and round a piece called Cells. My mind is triggered, my thoughts come fast. I scrabble in my bag for a pen. I cannot believe I don't have one. Very unusual. I rush back out to the shop and buy a pink pen with Louisiana written down the side. Much classier than the usual museum pens. I approach Cells again and then I sit on the floor with my notebook.

'Cells' is a sculpture, a cage of sorts. A BIG cage. It is divided internally by poles, hung with disintegrating tapestries, shirts, dresses, the poles run through the armholes, the clothing a poor woman's attempt to curtain off herself and her space. As the viewer you peer through the metal mesh of the cage. There is a tiny chair, on which are just the hips and legs of a human form, in bare feet. In the top corner of the cage is a spider.

'Passage Dangereux' is a larger structure, shaped like a passage with rooms coming off on both sides, all of it caged in. You cannot enter, only speculate. There is an old bed-frame with broken springs. On top of it are four wooden legs. If you look down the passage you can see the four feet, two on top, two below, like dead-people having sex. They whisk up images of war-wounded, ancient prosthetics, mutilation. Another room shows an old wooden chair, a kind of throne, yet the straps that hang from its arms suggest an ancient electric chair. There are rooms with pieces of bone in display bowls. And there is a spider, hanging from the top.

> *'I find the past terribly painful though I am tied to it. It's unresolved. Yet I have no taste for re-visitation. It's a landscape you have gone through and explored and outgrown. Only tomorrow is interesting.' (Louise Bourgeois Louisiana Museum, Denmark, 2003)*
>
> *'With Passage Dangereux Louise Bourgeois creates what one could call a transitional zone, a starting point for sub-conscious imagery, dream-like associations, and fragments of personal memory in the observer.' (Comment on the wall, alongside Passage Dangereux)*

I am plunged into memories and associations with my work in Colombia, El Salvador. I suddenly see her pieces as a part of a stage set. I have a narrative to display on this stage, of a group of families driven from their homes by gunmen, who take up residence in an old cock-fighting gallery in the nearest town. Each family claims a small space, and divides it from the rest by hanging their clothes and belongings on lines, functioning as drapes between living areas. I recall the nun who helps them saying to me and my colleague – What can you do for these people? Don't come here to gawp, what can you DO?. I imagine a scene, in which do-gooding white northerners, with big jeeps and emblazoned shirts, arrive to help these people living in a Louise Bourgeois memory, only half-people with no dignity, reduced to commandeering a space reserved for animals. I recall them feeding us with part of their rations they receive occasionally from the Red Cross, and then saying, please stop sending us lentils, we don't eat lentils. I stand mutely thinking again, I have no control of this. I sit on the floor embodying a memory of a meeting with the newly elected indigenous Governor of Cauca, the first indigenous governor ever elected. I see him in his heavy black skirt as he tells me that the previous corrupt and venal incumbent sold all the furniture and office equipment so that when he took office, he and his team had to sit on the floor.

These Passages are indeed dangereux. I have just left this world behind, but the stories are just there under my skin.

I recall the stories told to me by bewildered women, of men with machetes or chain saws, who cut off arms and legs and make the women watch as they play football with the heads. I see the bones in jars and the strange wooden prostheses in their play of love, and the chair which invites us to try the throne of death, and am moved to shredded tears. Bearing witness.

In an earlier room Bourgeois has hung knitted and patchwork heads, stuffed, like the toys I made badly in my sewing class at school, upside-down, and torsos, and bodies without arms. I only catch these as I circle the exhibition round again. They are both innocent and terrible. I see them as part of my unresolved past in some unnameable way, and I am cheered by her thoughts that exploration is indeed a plunge into tomorrow.

Breathing out and breathing in

It seems that I have used my voice for years to speak out, yet have found the speaking out lacking in love, growing rigid and repetitive, and hard. The struggle is to find a way to speak out in defence of justice, and maintain my belief in forgiveness and love as a tempering, merciful and essential component. This of course is not just a personal struggle, it is one that many have faced with the techno-rational world we live in. It feels irresolvable and probably is. It is simply a dynamic tension of our lives.

So, as part of learning to breathe again, I am working with art as a source of inspiration (in-breath) and an expression of love. The thing I hold in mind is that inspiration, that in-breath, brings me closer to the world. And that connection is secured through love. For me that inspiration comes largely through engagement with the artistic endeavour of another - Antony Gormley, Louise Bourgeois,– and finds expression through my writing. For instance, the poem I wrote for Alice and James transforms our individual and collective experience. I write as a way of transforming our conversational experience into an aesthetic one. I sense Alice's pain, feel my own despair, and want to offer something up, something of beauty, something healing, something that takes us beyond.

Jointly and separately we created the conditions for the poem. It is an expression of love.

Ending the writing

There is of course no end to this, just an attempt to complete as far as possible this chapter in my life. To draw together this network of experience, way of being, way of acting, and knowing, and reflect on where I am now, in my ability to be better what I have always wanted to be: a force for change, acting as much as possible out of, rather than through my anger, channelled through my belief that love is powerful and transforming. This is tempered by an understanding that we cannot know what will happen when we act, but we can sense ways of affecting the webs of social relations and interacting that open up possibilities for change, and create the potential for love to arise. There is certainly knowledge that I think I have gained in this process, knots that I think I know better. By knowing them better, I can see how they can continue to be threaded together with other parts of the net, and sense how they might weave on outwards.

To go back to the beginning, when Maturana began to weave for us a history of his thinking in that Seminar on 6 September, he began a narrative of his life and work, woven around important moments of insight and reflection. This included wise words from his mother, challenging questions from his tutor, experiments he had done when he realised he was asking the wrong question. What this added up to was indeed a narrative of the development of his inquiring, thinking and reflection.

I look back over the writing of this thesis and I see how I have in some sense told and retold a narrative of this development of self throughout. I have been walking you through the way I inquire and make sense of what I find, and into the processes that occur when I work with others. The narratives are not simply stories of making sense, they are authentic sense-making in action. In a sense, this writing the end is ending the writing through another narrative of sense-making.

This resonates with Kushner's reflections on the nature of self. He places himself with Berger, sharing a belief in the idea that we are many selves held together by the 'thread of memory', selves that are present in different contexts. The authenticity and coherence of those many selves become apparent through the way they consistently search for meaning (2000, pp. 143-4).

To be consistent, and to honour Collingwood (1939), it might help if I tell you what the questions are now, to which this final narrative is a response:

What am I learning through this process, about that self, about what drives me, and how I work? What have I been doing with others, and how does that influence my work and the world I work in? What use might that be to you, what might you be able to do with the knowledge created through this process?

I'm always asking myself these kinds of questions. I keep asking them partly to make me think clearly about this thesis. What am I trying to communicate, explain, show you, when it comes to me and my ways of knowing, doing and being in the world? Can I get into the mood and mystery of my life and work, as Kushner quietly urges me to do, without bleeding it of all life, boring us, annotating it to death? And I keep asking them partly because as they come out and form on the page they take on the power of creation.

What am I learning through this process, about that self, about what drives me, and how I work?

It is with persistent questioning that this narrative starts. I cannot remember a time when I was not asking questions. I recall the frustration of my human biology teacher, faced with me asking 'why?' as I wanted to know more and more about the processes of what Maturana & Varela (1998) call 'living systems', asking why to the point where she had no answers. This is not a habit I acquired. I think this is written into who I am, inscribed in Madeline. Over five years of paying close attention, through writing-reflecting and asking myself, 'what is going on here, what process is this?, I sense that I have reached a place 'where insights occur, where words may acquire a depth of meaning' (van Manen, 2002, p. 3) that can only come through profound connection to the inquiry.

I am learning that my addiction to asking questions is questionable, should be questionable. I mean that I must ask questions of this too. I have come to see that I have distorted my capacity to be both compassionate and loving by holding on to the high-ground when it comes to asking questions. If I seek to control the territory of interaction in this way, by being in control of the inquiry agenda, I will never truly live in the interacting moment.

This is where that damp stain of bullying emerges for me again and again. I have internalised and embodied that experience in my practice of questioning. My determination to know, to be close to others finds expression, if I am not careful, in a bullying, nagging, berating, interrogating tendency. This comes out in my activism, in my anger, where I will demand that others act on the implications of my questions. They can be disguised demands, like those lawyer-like questions. I know what I want to hear. This is largely, I think, **a resistance to being seen**.

Time and again during this research period I have been asked to show myself. Others have needed to know what it is I am doing, and who I am when I am doing it. I have learned that it is not so hard to let people know, and it can be highly creative. This increasing willingness to be seen has shown me that real interacting networks of relation can only be built through the kind of trust generated by mutual exposure. In the world of work this mutual exposure comes through doing together, and creating together, and it is this that **forms the bonds that allow us to be our best selves**. This is what draws me to networks, the possibility of loving relation.

My attention to 'embodiment' has been rich and revealing. The way I experience the interaction I have with my environment and those around me, is subtle and strange and defiant when it comes to words. I have used my many and varied writings about what this connection feels like, how I sense it, what draws me and sucks me in, to show you what I mean by this because this is the only way I can. I have had to write this from myself, as I have not found expression in the words of other writers (including Varela) that helps to explain my experience. My knowledge of myself has come through writing about the subtle experience of response to Gormley's art, to Bourgeois, and the shape-changing I experience when I speak another language or play a part. It is a form of phenomenological attention to something that can only be revealed through my writing my self.

I have written my way round what it means to be both 'a part of' and 'apart from'. This finds expression in my work in Colombia, for instance, allowing me to be sufficiently touched to allow me to see an individual and be able to visualise the whole. What I call shape-changing is the embodiment of something akin to compassion, a way of offering to know another by being within my own skin and theirs.

I have been allowed to see by Rayner (1997, 2004), and Maturana & Varela (1998), that my framing of being 'a part and apart' has some connection to embodied biological processes. The 'living system' or entity that Maturana & Varela describe has process boundaries: the system is bounded by those things that participate in the processes of its living. That struggle for meaning Kushner writes about became less of a struggle for me when I spent time pondering on Rayner's notions of porous boundaries. I had already spent years writing about and telling people about my experience of strange connections with my environment, yet it was Rayner that asked me to think about the extent of individuality; not what is this individual, but how individual is this? This leads me to understand that I am a part of a network of relations that are essential for my survival. I **must be connected to others in order to be alive.**

This relation with my environment influences all the work that I am involved in. I tend not to think of my self in terms of what job I do. This is probably why I spend time in the first two sections of the thesis working to bring you to some understanding of important defining experiences that I feel I have embodied, and in this absorption have become. It is also why I find it tricky to respond to the 'What do you do?' question. The doing comes out of the being, and the being influences the doing. This thing I call bullying, for instance, is not something I consider myself to be a victim of, but something that gives this 'self' definition. It simply is there in everything I am and do.

This sense of my self operates powerfully when I work. It is this understanding of my self as someone in touch with their environment and keen to inquire that determines how I do my work. It allows me to do what I think Scharmer (2004) refers to when he talks of 'presencing': bringing into presence, and the present, what is called for. It gives me a kind of opening, an ability to connect with all perspectives and parties in a piece of work, such that I can see them operating as a network of relations. It doesn't change when the work changes. This occurs in my work with networks as much as in my evaluation work.

I have come to think of myself as someone who can determine what the good questions are to ask. My commitment as an evaluator is to **ask good questions**, reveal learning and encourage those who have to do the work to find ways to shift the sticky difficult bits. It is to place in full view of those involved what I see as the dynamics at work, and to provide a mediator's eye on the complexities of the many perspectives and relationships that make up a project. I don't presume to know. I **resist providing answers**, or claiming the kind of 'connoisseurship' that is characteristic of evaluation practice in which the evaluator is indeed placed high up in the 'hierarchy of judgement' (Kushner, 2002, p.118). I like to be seen as someone who is prepared to test others and her own assumptions about worth, and someone who can hold the complexity of context, people, ideas and practice in sight as well as see where movement forward might happen. I do this largely by engaging in conversation and creating relationship.

I have found my self reflected in Patricia Shaw's (2002) professional account of 'changing the conversation' as a way of being and doing. I can see myself here, as I move and shape-change my way in and out of webs of relation. I am at home in the

present of improvisation, at ease with the way human interaction works. I do not, I am relieved to say, see the present as a burden to be overcome (van Manen, 1997), but believe we make our world in the present. Maturana, in talking about democracy as a way of organising based on respect and love, says 'democracy is a work of art, you have to be creating it day by day, moment by moment.' (A day with Humberto Maturana, 6th Sept 2004) It is this that encourages me to do what I do.

What I have come to know is that without a commitment to knowing myself, coming to know myself, I cannot be a knowledgeable practitioner. What I like about Kushner, for instance is that he offers a vision of 'the evaluator juggling with competing identities and attendant feelings and responses in each present moment.' (2000, p. 124) and does not regard this as something to be overcome, but as something to be understood. He talks openly about the becoming, the bringing into being of his sense of self as an evaluator, and uses images which bring to mind movement and responsiveness, and a shifting, fluid view of the humanness of this work. He suggests that it is in our knowing of ourselves that we become knowledgeable practitioners.

What have I been doing with others, and how does that influence my work and the world I work in?

I started this inquiry process because I was concerned that the way I and we worked in networks was not visible in the kind of evaluation criteria routinely used to evaluate projects and programmes. The network-working that so characterised the work I and many others were doing could not be fully appreciated or understood through standard evaluation approaches. The work we did in the Action Research Group was profoundly influenced by this nagging doubt, this question, and the way it developed and found form owes a lot to this unease.

The real engagement that was created with the co-researching colleagues in the Action Research Project, and those that the project came into contact with, allowed us to put together some really influential ideas about what networks are, and how they can be imagined. We know the ideas are influential because others have said so. My belief is that we had the embodied knowing with and between us, knowing that the core of a network is to allow community to grow through respecting and valuing the potential of each individual, to give room for flourishing, while finding ways to work together on shared purpose. We worked with this pattern and process, and through doing so found our way to articulating what it looked like and how it could be communicated to others. The networked way we worked together embodied our knowing, and our knowing became revealed in the process.

Since completing that phase of my research, I have paid attention to my work as an evaluator, digging deeper into the **frameworks** we use and the **language** we have adopted.

Experience, my own and that of others, is that we are often keen and sharp when it comes to identifying the problem, we have after all learned 'problem-solving' as part of our mental models (Senge, 1995). We take refuge in this skill. We are then urged on constantly to specify what we will do to overcome these problems, to be clear about how we will solve what we have identified as needing fixing. Yet we are dealing with highly complex situations (war, poverty, structural inequality, discrimination). What Senge & Scharmer might call 'generative complexity' (2001, p. 247). We are faced with a tension

between current reality, knowing 'what the problem is', and those emerging futures, still emerging, largely unknown, non-determined, the not-yet-enacted, in which we require ourselves to act. This sense of emergence sits ill with a framework, a model of intervention that demands that we specify what we will do, as if we do, indeed, know how things will turn out.

This model, this 'logical framework' is where we derive the demand for evaluation from, and as such my work as an evaluator requires me to negotiate these two worlds. That of the unknown, intuitive, best-guess, idealistic maybe but certainly unknown, in which people are working 'to implement' plans and negotiate the distance between that and the reality they experience, and that of the logical model of 'if we do this, this will surely happen' inherent in project and programme planning, out of which evaluation is born. My skill, I think, is in being able to hold the shape of one, while asking pertinent questions of the other. Such questions include: why have we chosen to work with such inappropriate frameworks for our doing? Where might we find other, more appropriate ones?

At a metaphysical level, this is may well be an inevitable tension generated by the only certainty that we have, our own mortality. Kushner's thesis is that

> *'Social programs are vehicles for the cooption of people into ideal, even utopian, political states, that is, states which too often represent the denial of complexity and shortfall.' (2000, p. 26)*

He suggests that our desire to be perfect, to be effective, with perfect programs, is a way of avoiding the inevitability of death. This is somehow translated by all of us into a notion of protecting and engineering society, the place we have constructed in which to feel safe and protected from death. Or as he puts it

> *'The difficulty we have of confronting the reality that programs will most often fall short of their desired goals is partly conditioned by our reluctance to concede failure – which is itself a condition of a collective denial of mortality represented in that notion of 'social death'. (ibid.)*

Matuarana contends that if we construct our societies as places where we cannot make mistakes, or change our opinions, we create a world in which we cultivate lying, a world in which there simply is no room for or meaning in reflection (A day with Humberto Maturana, 6 Sept 2004). I worry that our determination to plan and evaluate brings with it the dangers of erasing any space for real learning if it is tied to frameworks that are so results-oriented that they cannot but punish the failure to achieve. He encourages us to take our attention off results and pay attention to the processes of living. van Manen urges us to regain hope by 'dwelling' in the business of doing, rather than paying constant attention to where we might go and where we have been (1997).

Connected to this in complex ways is the language that we use to describe our work. The language of military victory infects all we do. We speak of targets, aims, strategies and allies as if our living is a battleground. Maybe this is not surprising, when we work in areas in which we must stand up and speak out against brutality and injustice and the violence of poverty and exclusion. We somehow lose sight of ourselves in our passionate determination to change things.

My experience working in Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, is that those of us involved in human rights and political activism find ourselves drawn into the lives and struggles of others. A consequence of this is the temptation to inhabit the role of victims, and speak on their behalf. Identification leads us to believe we are accountable only to them. We are then supremely challenged when faced with the question of whether or not to support armed struggle, armed struggle by those who see themselves as powerless to change things in other ways. Faced with dictatorships and the brutal violence of the powerful, we see how easy it is to argue for 'just war', find it hard to resist the logic of undermining military might with military subversion. Many of my working days have been spent wrestling with these ethical questions, and wrestling with people wrestling with them.

Maturana, with wise words, suggests that the language we use does not describe our doing, but constitutes it. Our doing is determined in some way by the language we put to it. If this is the case, then it is only by consciously changing the language we use that we can reconstitute our doing.

I have learned through this process, and through my relationship with the Alternatives to Violence Project, that violence, in any form, is a language of resistance that is reductionist, and one that is ultimately very poor at communicating, or contributing to, what is needed for change to occur. Guns or weapons substitute for real power, but they are temporary gains that over time damage the ability of those using them to see expansively. Guerrillas in Latin America, once popular heroes, have come to use the kinds of means that obscure their ends. Weapons reduce, not increase, one's capacity to find real power. They increase, not reduce, the fear of those using them, in apparent contradiction to the gun lobby and weapons manufacturers assertion. No amount of weaponry will ever provide the average insurgent with the power they need to run a country if they ever overthrow the regime, because such power comes with legitimacy, right action, and just decisions. No gun will ever encourage that capacity to grow. And legitimacy, right action and just governance include an understanding that we are all inter-dependent in the social contract, and that justice must be merciful and pain must be healed, if we are to build fair and forgiving societies.

Yet the language of compassion, healing, and love has little currency in the policy alternatives people create or are prepared to engage with. The security agenda these days has been defined on such narrow terms that the only response appears to be greater military hardware, or police surveillance, to deal with serious social problems. Similarly the language we use for our action in the world, these words like aims, targets, strategies, they disguise the humanness of what we are really about, and carry traces of war that undermine our capacity for love.

Similarly the language of 'need' we use currently keeps us in the dark. We focus our attention on the word 'need'. This word increasingly feels like a black hole of lacking, emptiness, a space to be filled. We create a world of failed potential in our minds, as we track across the 'needs' of those we work with, and drag ourselves into an expanding place of 'never enough'. I chip away at this in the many and varied places where I go. I resist asking or answering the question, 'what do you need from this?' when I attend a workshop or conference. My response is to talk about contribution, ideas and potential. The work we did on networks and evaluation influenced this, and I use the energy it gave me to continue to influence others. This emphasis on unique contributions is crucial to

my understanding of what makes or breaks working together. It taps into our energy and drive, and releases what is there.

Maturana holds one learning moment clear in his mind: the day his tutor told him that if he wanted to say something new, and bring forth a different world, he had to change the language he was using. My determination has become to speak a different language; a language of love and compassion and human potential. Balancing anger with love and compassion is a really hard road. It is so much easier in the fire of passion to be vengeful. Rigid. Unforgiving. And in the flexibility of love the arc of anger easily flops, becomes flaccid. Sappy. Routing anger into action that not only does no harm, but transforms and encourages life well-lived with integrity, in me and others, is an effort that requires constant attention, reflection, and questions. Here, too, I think I have a contribution to make, in changing the conversation, and looking for new words.

Transforming experience

Lastly, I have learned what it is to write my way into knowing. What makes me me is that I am writing about it. Here. Now. Pondering it and writing it. This is how I make meaning, and it is often wonderful fun, not just a struggle.

The process of the doctorate has been one of me getting to know the depth and complexity of my personal professional being, largely through attempting to account for myself to a reader. The act of writing, committing to paper, to text, has been an act of faith in the power of writing to reveal in some mysterious way a question, then a response, a further question and response, and through that process create space for a more detailed, nuanced, and complex picture of myself in practice to emerge. This is not writing up knowledge, this is knowing created by writing.

This is a process that includes much not knowing, desperation, creative flux, sensing, and tracing the very tied up and complex threaded nature of the connections that come to make up the whole. I have learned that it is a process that happens whenever I attempt any piece of sense-making. I have to write it around and around and around, and come in and out and stand and wait. If I follow the hyphens, I will be able to see it differently. And it is this 'seeing differently' that means I can emerge out of the spinning process. Many of Maturana's moments in his history of thinking were moments when he realised he was asking the wrong question. He needed to pose the question differently in order to see differently. He needed a new language to describe that new seeing. This is what happens when I write. The question clarifies, and the language rises to meet it.

It has taken me a long time working away at this thesis to get to something that, now its there, looks incredibly obvious. I could not connect in my mind the experience of being bullied, and the work I was doing in networks. The connection with working in places like Colombia, in AVP, and my responses to the horrors of Rwanda, urged on by that bruise on my skin, these things I knew at the start. I had already a certainty that I could never just stand around and watch while others brutalise their fellow beings. I had read enough Primo Levi and Rigoberta Menchu, and had written out enough testimonies and made enough submissions to UN institutions to know how they connected. Like I said in the introduction, 'person bullied resolves to fight injustice', an oft-told story.

I have written myself round and round the knots and threads of my experience of embodied connection with my environment, my curiosity, and my fight with the 'apart of

and apart from' question over five years. I could see certain things -standing up, being counted, creating communities, and acting against violence with love – but I couldn't get to the simplicity of the connecting idea.

It is writing, that mysterious process of getting inside the fabric by externalising, moulding, watching for words, that has brought me to myself.

Mainly what I have learned here is that I was bullied in part because I resisted the cosy, lazy, dangerous power of the gang, the group, the self-referencing community. I asked questions that upset the balance of things. I wanted to know why things were as they were. I didn't buy into 'accepted norms' of teaching people a lesson. I poked away at the things you were supposed to accept as fact. I have never felt a part of this way of knowing and being. **Being bullied simply made me less a part.**

Yet I have always been exuberant in my joy at finding ways of exploring things with other people. I have spent my life searching out good company, challenging people, interesting writers and inspiring ideas. This intensified search for connection has involved hard work. I have struggled with my instinct to resist being known by others, to resist exposing myself and revealing who I am. I have avoided joining, becoming a member, preferring instead to hover around the edges. As such I have ended up creating a community for myself, in the only way that makes any sense to me, both in my personal life and my professional life: through **forming networks of connection and relation**.

It is this that links my life, my work and my lived experience. **I find myself in networks**. I can be myself, and have just enough community to be at ease. Their self-organising nature, in flat structures of autonomous entities, releases me from the pain of dealing with hierarchies of judgement. The voluntary nature of the engagement, held together through the levels of trust created out of joint purpose, this makes sense to me as a reason for being together. Here I can be angry and forgiving, active and reflective. I can be in at times, and out at others. There are the seeds of love here. **Somehow here I find room to breathe.**

And then again.....

BELONGING

In the process of moving through to acceptance in the Academy, I am sent two pre-viva reports by my external and internal examiners. These constitute the substance of the areas that the examiners are intending to touch on in the viva voce examination.

In an attempt to understand 'what is going on here?' I start to write out some responses to the following questions from my external examiner. I know I must respond robustly in the viva.

1. What checks does Madeline have against self-deception?
2. On what grounds is the reader asked to believe this account?
3. In the world of meaning represented in this thesis, what stands for data and evidence?
4. What are the limits to critique that Madeline is inventing here?
5. How are the three principal themes finally resolved?

This writing of myself onto the page, again, constitutes not just a final learning curve in this inquiry, but illuminates more clearly what stands for data and evidence in this research, and how such research can be validated as knowledge. Holding the questions in mind, I work through a way to explain and not just describe what my thesis offers in terms of knowledge.

This sentence 'holding the questions in mind' and 'working through' doesn't really do justice to the amount of thinking, processing, writing, speaking, thinking, dreaming, thinking, writing and again, goes on when I hold something in mind like this.

My external examiner asks, 'What counts for data and what for evidence in this world of meaning here?' I spend a long session reading the comments and pondering this issue of data and evidence. In working my way through, it seems that validity is the main issue for him. I realise that it would help to bridge the divide between worlds of meaning if I could explain this in more detail. It requires me to stand in his world, and speak from mine, creating a connection to the 'other' while retaining the individuality which finds expression in this thesis. It is another act of standing within and without, of shape-changing, and of resisting a community of conformity (all data and evidence are tested and agreed in the same way) in pursuit of a community of diversity (multiple ways of knowing validated by appropriate criteria). I sense that through this process I am creating an uncompromised place to belong.

The thesis

The starting premise is that the only thing I actually have any control over is myself, and the way I act. It is this that I can affect. This requires me to pay attention to 'being', to the being of Madeline. Ontology, therefore, is my entry point into a self-study account of my learning over time. In the field of self-study, much emphasis is laid on attention to practice, to doing, and to asking how that practice might improve by examination of that practice. My entry point is on paying attention to 'being', self, and the way that 'being' creates the 'doing' of practice. In turn, the very act of paying attention to 'being', and the effect that 'being' has on 'doing', transforms the nature of the 'doing' and the 'being'.

As I pay attention to myself, I test that knowing by gradually revealing myself and what I know about myself to others, in conversation, pieces of writing, accounting for myself as I speak about what I am researching. This is an exercise not only of triangulation but has transformation integrated into it. As I test this out, I am overcoming the desire not to be known. It is hard, this revealing process, like peeling back and exposing. And in that act of accounting for myself I find more evidence of the way in which resisting being seen prevents me from being in connection with others, which is what I desire.

The lived experience, and its effect on my action in the world, begins to be transformed. I find that accounting for myself has power, generative effects, it creates the possibility of further connection and knowledge.

This way of working allows for closeness to the 'thing', and distance from it. The thesis here is that getting close to the interior qualities, the ineffableness of the 'thing', will allow me to see by what criteria I can value it, judge it. In the research project on networks and evaluation we quickly found that we needed to pay attention to the nature of the thing first, as lived and experienced by those involved in the action research group and those we connected with, if we were to understand and know about how to evaluate it. The knowledge we generated about the nature of the thing has been used and is being 'tested', let's say, by others, who work in networks, and as that happens, the criteria we use to evaluate this thing become better known.

So, knowing more about myself, through paying attention to this lived experience means that I begin to see how I judge myself, to clarify what I hold to be the standards I live by and which live in me as I choose my work, and do any work.

And as those standards become clearer to me, they affect me and what I do. As such they are alive and working. They become my negative feedback process, the way I stay alive to my practice. Am I acting here from my commitment to fairness, and my compassionate self? Am I connected enough to be able to stand on your ground, while at the same time able to stay standing on mine? Am I revealing enough of who I am and what I am doing here for you to be able to hold me to account? This is how bullying, self-knowledge, evaluation and networks are networked together.

So what counts for data and evidence in this world of meaning?

The data I use is what comes from that paying attention. I hold 'the thing' in mind in every context I am in. The 'object' of attention starts as, 'What effect has bullying had on Madeline?' and I carry it with me wherever I go. There is the 'object' of attention and there is Madeline, two constants in all contexts. As I hold this in my attention, as I write about it, think about it, and watch my practice through this lens, it begins to reveal different aspects. This is a first layer data-base. I read my writing, and talk about my thoughts and reflections to others. I see some obvious evidence here that one effect of this bullying, and it seems like the easiest to see, is that 'Madeline makes choices about where she works as a result of being bullied', (in defence of human rights, standing alongside others, determined to stand up for fairness and justice).

This is the first round. In holding the 'what effect?' question in mind, other less startling but more interesting evidence emerges from the data, and generates a deeper aspect to the object of attention. One deeper aspect, for instance, is the nature of Madeline's

question-forming. It appears that Madeline likes to ask questions, is good at asking questions, and is, maybe, rather unhealthily addicted to asking questions. Again, sustained attention to this, the way it manifests itself in every context (work, home, human interaction, writing) generates more data, another layer of data to be examined and understood.

Such examination reveals confusing evidence. The data-gathering process of sustained and maintaining attention has revealed something that surfaces as 'Madeline always asks the deeper question' and is felt by Madeline as an embodied understanding of what is itching to be asked. At the same time, there seems to be an embedded resistance to being seen, that leads to a sophisticated practice of deflecting attention by turning the question on the questioner. Lastly, there is evidence of an internalised practice of bullying which suggests that Madeline can be a bully, and this is revealed through her questioning practice.

So, paying attention generates evidence that Madeline has incorporated a practice of resistance to bullying that is personally protective – asking questions – has bullying tendencies built into it, and as an expression of curiosity is in itself questionable.

This evidence leads me to ask what such evidence might help me to see about what appears to be a lived paradox - a desire to know, and a desire not to be known – and to ask if one is possible if the other remains in place.

This, then, becomes a second object of attention, held in mind as contexts shift. It is also, in itself, evidence of Madeline being drawn to asking the deeper question.

This means Madeline is now holding the 'what effect?' question in mind, and the 'what is going on in Madeline's question-forming processes? in all contexts. This generates more data, about more mysterious embodied knowing, and the nature of connection across seemingly rigid boundaries of self and space. What presents itself here as evidence is more opaque. Yet it is present in the nature of the being of Madeline, and affects the way I work. As such it is worthy of my attention, and requires me to know it better, to attend to how it affects my work and interaction with others.

And so on. As I work with this notion of boundaries to self, I weave back into the experience of being bullied and begin to wonder if this boundary question isn't somehow related to the way others both fear, and are attracted to, Madeline. And I also weave outwards, and start to pay attention to what this means in terms of my responses to community and belonging. I begin to understand how my resistance to being known is a resistance to a community of conformity, and my desire for connection is an expression of my delight in communities of diversity. This is more evidence of being drawn to asking deeper questions, not simply persistently asking questions. My external examiner asks if persistent questioning is enough if we are not sure we are asking the right questions. I'm not sure in this territory I would use terms such as 'right'. However, it is clear to me that the questions that have depth and the energy to hold the attention over prolonged periods are worth asking, in this time, now. And they evolve as the inquiry progresses.

What, therefore counts as valid when it comes to being seen as knowledge, a claim to know? Is this simply an exercise in self-deception? What counts for data negotiation and triangulation in this world?

What brings rigour to this process is the dogged nature of attention. Of never quite letting go. In this thesis, the whole context of work and life, of practice in many jobs, and interaction with people, art and academic literature constitute data. Evidence is regularly culled from the data to give greater depth to the question, to bring another aspect or perspective to bear on the 'thing', to bring into attention other 'things' that might illuminate the nature of this self and its effect on doing. And such methodology, at least in this instance, provides evidence that transformation of practice (if in this case one aspect of my practice is question-forming) is at least possible through attention to the ontological, and not just the methodological, or the 'how do we do it better' question.

Triangulation in this world means entering the space from many places, walking around it like you would a sculpture, and watching it from many perspectives. It is also a bit like revealing a sculpture out of stone, paying attention to, and interacting with, its emergence. This requires me to be both a part of the question and a part from it. I must trace its relationship to other aspects, entering from different places. I watch from inside - what does it feel like, how does it affect my body, how does my body affect it, how does my body interact with the artwork of others – and I watch from outside - through writing myself out onto the page, paying attention to what is on the page and writing again, asking others what they see, watching how they react. The many voices in the text of Madeline seek to convey those places: writing / bodily sensing, the artwork of others, the holding of pertinent questions in mind, multiple conversations with others. Those places of connecting with the inquiry are also manifestations of the field of knowing. They are the matter arising as the inquiry takes form and shape.

In the sub-set of the thesis, in which the project to develop more appropriate network evaluation methodology sits, the published Working Paper 121 is a more standard example of data negotiation. All members of the group involved in the conversational practice we developed approved the data we generated, and all made inputs into the report and had a chance to suggest edits and changes. I take the example of participation. It was clear through the questionnaires and the action research group that the participation of network participants, how to increase it, sustain it, make it more 'productive' (in evaluation terms), was the central area that did not get covered in standard evaluation methodologies used in the field. This evidence of 'failure' of standard approaches led us to work on how to 'measure' participation, and what criteria we needed to pay attention to in that area. This is what led to thinking through alternative evaluation strategies, ones more appropriate to the nature of the thing, the network.

The project was intended to make evaluation useful for people working in and with networks. What counts as evidence here is that people are using the work.

What appears to be valid as knowledge in the context of international social change networks is that attention to their nature has created the possibility that those working within them can generate criteria appropriate to their nature. This is linked to the above, in that alternative evaluation methodology can be generated from the knowledge of the nature of this 'thing' called network, and based on criteria that fits the 'thing'. This inevitably is not complete, indeed feels like it has only just begun, especially when it comes to internalising a practice of paying attention to the nature of the network thing and encouraging the setting of criteria appropriate to same. What counts as evidence here is that people have responded to the work not as to a 'toolkit' but as an illumination of the nature of the thing that they wish to judge. This, in turn, is evidence that the inquiry

into the nature of a thing can create standards of judgement which more appropriately respond to our desire to know what is valid and what not.

Lastly, the text itself is evidence that I choose to hold myself to account in relation to clearly articulated values. In this text the evidence is there that I am noticing certain things and not others. The very fact that I am looking for evidence of this, rather than something else, in the data, indicates that I am holding myself to account in relation to these values and standards rather than other values and standards.

This can be seen in the standards I use for myself, and my action, when I evaluate (which are distinct from standards I might use to evaluate a thing that has its own appropriate criteria, such as a network) and which can be found on p122. I watch as I see how my values translate into living standards. These are summarized as appreciation, care, understanding and critical insight, what I call an act of 'valuation grounded in an ethical standpoint'. It involves acting with care, with an intention to be inspirational, not judgmental. I clearly state that 'I would feel that I had failed,' were people to consider I had acted otherwise. As such I am accountable to others, I can be called to account if I fail to meet these standards.

The text is evidence that paying attention in this way creates knowledge of my self which can then lead to transformation. I have come to know this. In this world of meaning, knowledge is created about the effect of bullying on Madeline, which can then be seen to be transformed. This is most noticeable by examining the 'accounting for' process. An example: through paying attention, I notice that I resist being seen, and this manifests itself in never quite telling anybody anything. As I notice this I notice that such resistance serves me ill in my search for connection, which is what I both desire and wish to control. As I begin to allow others to question me, and to connect to others, as I begin to account for my learning process through writing, I find that that the very 'accounting for' process transforms my creative connections, and allows me to understand better the criteria I use to judge myself, and what I wish to be accountable to. As such I am creating, through inquiry, standards of judgment for myself, which Whitehead would call living standards. This is knowledge that may be useful for the future purposes of testing validity in self-study accounts.

Creating an account that not just describes but shows a process of transformation over time, and is an example itself of the methodology of holding in mind and paying attention to an evolving 'thing' (which evolves and transforms as the account is created) contributes to the development of standards of judgment for self-study accounts, which Whitehead (2004) and Bullough and Pinnegar (2004, p. 319) suggest are needed in the field.

> As I am turning the examiner's questions over and over in my mind on the morning of the viva, I begin to see something. I realize that what I am holding in mind are the vast array of question marks upon the page '**?????**' (there are no less than 18 questions in the five pages of pre-viva notes I have been asked to read and pay attention to) and the word **Madeline**, a word used 21 times throughout the text. I am also holding in mind a desire to stay connected to others in the room as I conduct myself in this very exposing viva process. I am sure that this is the first hurdle. If I can find myself here, in the academy, and create a place here in which I can feel like I belong, then this doctoral work will indeed have transformed my action and being in the world. To do this I must stay connected. I see I

have set myself a test. I chose these examiners. I wanted them to read and interrogate my accounting for myself. There will be three diverse ways of knowing in the room. Can we all find a place in which we both encounter one another and let the other arise? Can I hold what I experience as intrusive and difficult questions in the spirit in which I hope they were intended? Can I resist my habitual responses when faced with the questions of others? If I can then I will have internalized what I describe as transformation. I have paid real, dedicated attention to these questions and as such found multiple revelations in them. They have provided me with the opportunity to continue the process of transformation. I will have recovered myself, Madeline, and found myself here.

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APPENDICES

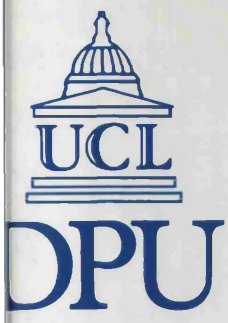
CONTENTS

APPENDIX I

Participation, Relationships and Dynamic Change: New thinking on evaluating the work of international networks.

WORKING PAPER 121

CHURCH, M *ET AL.* (2003)



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Madeline Church *et al*

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PARTICIPATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND DYNAMICS CHANGE:
New Thinking On Evaluating The Work Of International Networks

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The UK Department for International Development (DFID) supports policies, programmes and projects to promote international development. DFID provided funds for this study as part of that objective but the views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) alone."

PARTICIPATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND DYNAMIC CHANGE:
New Thinking On Evaluating The Work Of International Networks

SUMMARY

On our understanding of networks

The world is becoming a networked environment. This is having a profound impact on the way we organise at the local, national and international level. We need to find new ways to think and talk and make meaning about our linked work.

While many of us now work in formally constituted networks, this way of relating is not new. Informal networks have been the basis of family, community, and even politics for centuries. However, particularly in the field of international development, the formal network has become the modern organisational form.

Many positive characteristics are attributed to networks, not least their capacity to challenge and change embedded power relations. If we are to find our way to counter-acting the negative effects of economic liberalisation and globalisation, especially on the marginal and under-represented on the world stage, we need a greater understanding of how to build and sustain powerful networks based on the values of dignity in development for all.

Networks have the potential to connect diverse actors, in many countries and at many levels. People participate through commitment to a shared purpose, as autonomous decision-making agents, joined together through shared values. People undertake activities together, often simultaneously, often spread across geographical space. It is the linked nature of the work, and the quality of participation in the shared space of the network, that makes this kind of working unique.

In this research we have begun to develop a deeper understanding of this uniqueness. This brings together ideas about the way relationship, trust, collaborative action, structure, participation and reflection inter-relate in the network form. Each connects to the other through a feedback loop, and each affects the other. We have built on Chambers' (1997) four Ds - diversity, dynamism, democracy and decentralisation - as core attributes of networked working.

Trust and relationship

Relationship is of fundamental importance. When autonomous individuals organise to do something together, and when that autonomy and diversity constitute our basic 'resources', the *relationship* between those diverse people constitutes the connective tissue of the 'network being'. These relationships are strengthened as trust grows. Trust grows through working together and reflecting together on that work. Acting together is born out of shared values, values that also need to be revisited and articulated over time.

Part of that trust-building work is done by the co-ordination function, in a constantly engaged process of knowing the members, facilitating their interaction, helping them to be in connection with one another. Co-ordinator(s) facilitate *and* lead.

Decision-making in such networks faces the challenge of autonomous and voluntarily participating 'entities' who may be reluctant to be 'represented' but also reluctant to commit to taking authority. Trust provides the glue that allows control to be relinquished into the hands of those will act in the best interests of all.

Structure

What kind of structure does this kind of work need? Network structures in this field tend to have a co-ordination centre or secretariat, and a management or representative committee as a minimum. Too tight a structure, with many rules and regulations for participation may strangle creative spirit, diversity and dynamism. Too much time spent on internal business and management is draining.

Too light a structure demands that very high levels of trust are present, which is generally only possible in smaller networks.

While structure needs to evolve with the network, and respond to the demands of the network, the ideal is the minimum structure and decision-making necessary to encourage democratisation, diversity, decentralisation and dynamism in our practice, not simply our rhetoric. Where decision-making happens in the structure needs to be transparent. Similarly, it needs to be clear which spaces are not intended to be decision-making arenas. Mixing up consultation, information-sharing and decision-making groups or committees tends to generate confusion and unnecessary demands for decisions.

Participation

Participation is a key word for network working. Individuals and institutions join together voluntarily to work for a common

purpose without losing their autonomy or identity. A network depends for its vitality, dynamism and capacity for creative action on the quality and extent of that participation. Those whose strategic objectives most closely match the objectives of the network are likely to participate more regularly, and be more concerned with the development of the network. Those more tangentially interested will tend to participate at key moments of relevance for them.

Clarity of purpose helps to ensure that participants know what to expect and what they can offer. Participation levels ebb and flow. High levels of participation might be present in a big UN conference, whereas at other times, participation may be more passive. Snapshots of moments in time can be misleading.

Individuals may move through different levels of participation on a regular basis. Such shifts and flows can indicate dynamism, or lack of focus, or may simply reflect the priorities of the member organisations.

Evaluation

Evaluation in the network context needs to pay attention to how networks foster participation by their members, how a network adds value to the work of its participants, and how linking participants and their work together across time and space can mobilise greater forces for change. Evaluation needs to be able to analyse that change both internally, at the level of processes, and externally, at the level of influencing activities.

Processes

Evaluation needs to be able to track the levels of dynamic engagement, understand the way contributions and benefits interrelate, and examine the mechanisms in place to foster trust-based relationships.

This project has developed some tools to help with these process-based activities:

Contributions Assessment

This helps a network to understand the level of commitment and contribution that its participants are offering, and to update this regularly. A Contributions Assessment is intended to see where the resources lie in the network. Evaluation can then be done on whether the network has facilitated circulation of resources, and given members the opportunity to participate. This should help to assess the dynamism and growth potential of the network. It moves away from the deficit-model, needs-led approach, placing emphasis on the passion and drive to make a difference of network participants.

Channels of Participation

This helps the network to understand how and where the members are interacting with the network, and what their priorities are. By acknowledging and monitoring the channels through which members interact, a network can begin to explain the nature of participation.

Monitoring Networking at the Edges

Finding ways to monitor how much 'networking' is being stimulated by the secretariat function helps to assess the level of independent exchange that is going on.

Check-list for Networks

This gives an overview of how a network works, with suggested evaluation questions covering:

- Participation
- Relationship-building and trust
- Facilitative leadership
- Structure and Control

- Diversity and Dynamism
- Decentralisation and Democracy

Influencing Activities

Attempts to disaggregate the 'impact' of the work of the individual members, and that of the network in a lobbying/advocacy environment misses the point. The important issue is to determine how far a network helps to foster co-ordinated, reciprocal action, action that can be replicated in a number of countries simultaneously; how it can be a repository for the combined analytical intelligence of its members, and stimulate better, more creative and debated responses in the very challenging work of human rights protection, peace-building and international development. This 'creative space' enables reciprocal learning to occur, and posturing or positioning to be questioned.

Evaluating lobbying and advocacy work in this context must try and understand the added-value that *linking* and *co-ordinating* bring to advocacy. These include:

- The improved quality and sophistication of joint analysis that underpins the advocacy;
- The extended reach to key actors in key contexts through which that improved analysis can be channelled;
- The capacity to act simultaneously, with shared ideas, in many places at once;

- The space for competing views to be discussed and consensus positions achieved;
- The opportunity for those with few other avenues to powerful decision-makers to gain access through the networked relationships.

Participatory Story-Building
This is an interactive evaluative exercise undertaken by network members and documented. Key actors, strategies and moments of change are mapped as a way of plotting the story of change that all are working together on. The exercise is intended to reveal:

- How far our strategies and understanding of the context is shared,
- How far the information, ideas, documents and analyses circulating in the network have helped us in the critical moments
- How far our individual mandates have allowed us to work creatively
- How connected we are to other actors in the chain.

It also helps to show what added-benefit can be reasonably be assumed from the networked nature of the work. It therefore deepens our shared understanding for future work. In this way, the exercise in itself is intended to build trust and linkages.

Cost-benefit
Networks fulfil fundamentally a process role, one of facilitating exchange, joint strategizing, sharing of analysis, and building of relationships. The maximum benefit at minimum cost comes when the members work separately but together, pursuing institutional objectives which are affected by the joint strategic thinking of the network, and can be put to the service of the network's shared understanding and analysis. The members do the work, using the capacity of the co-ordinator/ facilitator to foster creative thinking, share ideas, and support one another's lead activities when they can. This process constitutes the core cost of a network, and requires long-term minimal funding.

The cost starts to go up when the 'secretariat' or institutionalised function becomes synonymous with the network, and the secretariat begins to become more and more 'operational', doing more of the work itself. This is where traditional core costs start to take on greater prominence, more staff and equipment are needed.

Networks take time to consolidate, and get established. Network co-ordinators working over the long-term increase the whole network's capacity to understand its environment, the potential contributions of members, and the connections and relationships that need to be built along the way. Medium to long-term thinking is essential if institutional memory is to be retained and relationships nurtured.

PREFACE

The world is becoming a networked environment. In recent years a number of authors have expressed their concerns about the way the kind of evaluation methodology currently practised in the international development sphere fails to acknowledge and reflect the unique nature of networked working.

'In search of better evaluation and planning systems, we need to..learn how to understand networks as opposed to projects or organizations, particularly radical networks, transforming themselves all the time and committed to achieving political goals. Instead of trying to squeeze networks into existing planning, monitoring and evaluation systems, ***we need to look for new ways of PME that respond to the different realities and needs of networks, with the aim of strengthening them and allowing them to grow according to their own standards and goals.'*** *Emphasis added (Dutting & de la Fuente 1999:133)*

'There is a need for more systematic information and ***deeper analysis*** *in order to understand what "success" and "failure" might mean in relation to networks.' Emphasis added (HIV & Development Programme & UNAIDS, 2000:8-9)*

'This scoping study did not find substantive information on how organisations are monitoring and evaluating the development of networks and movements for advocacy (as opposed to monitoring and evaluating specific activities carried out by networks.) ***Appropriate monitoring and evaluation methodologies for networks needs to take into account their political nature and the 'invisible' effects of much of their work,*** *such as putting people in touch with each other, stimulating and facilitating action and the trust that enables concerted action.' Emphasis added (Chapman & Wamayo 2001:38)*

This project grew out of a desire to make monitoring and evaluation real and useful for networks. Networks have different realities to those of projects and programmes, which correspond to their often radical political nature, and their core of relationship, connecting and linking functions. We have taken networks' own standards and goals as our starting point in an attempt to discover monitoring and evaluation methodologies more appropriate to that unique nature. Along the way we have had to deepen our analysis of what a network means, what it means to work in a networked way, what holds a network together, and what facilitates its functioning.

The paper outcome of the project is this report, which is intended to be practical and useful. The report is pitched at practitioners, those in the *doing* business of co-ordinating and participating in networks, and at those who fund such activity, the donors, who then ask for 'accounts'. By 'accounts' we mean not simply financial, but the stories of success and difficulties encountered in the *doing* of the work. However, the process outcomes of this project are harder to put on paper. The dialogue and networking that have been at the centre of the research have made it possible for us to advance and deepen our understanding.

In brief, this report seeks to do several things:

- To stimulate debate on what is meant by a network. Numerous benefits and advantages are ascribed to working through networks. Starkey (1997) and Karl both highlight the skill sharing, exchange of experience and information aspects of networks as ones that enable capacity-building, reduce duplication of work, while at the same time improving responsiveness. They emphasise networks' capacity to engender dialogue across diverse groups, address global problems through global action locally rooted; reduce isolation, and increase potential for political or social action. Funders are increasingly spending resources on sustaining the structural and the activity aspects of networks. Yet our research indicates that those who work and participate in networks often struggle to define what they really mean by a network.
- To provide greater insight into how networks are working, from the perspective of those who co-ordinate them. This brings together key aspects such as the level and quality of participation by network participants, the relationships necessary to allow joint working, and the way these interact with decision-making.
- To highlight the monitoring and evaluation challenges inherent in working in a networked way. As the quotes above indicate, the 'project and programme' monitoring and evaluation methodology many are familiar with is felt to be

inappropriate to the specific context of a network.

- To reveal some of the ways in which networks have started to monitor and evaluate their work. While there is little available in written form (Karl's book *Measuring the Immeasurable* (1999) is a notable exception), network co-ordinators have much implicit understanding about the kinds of criteria they use to determine the success of their work. Many networks continuously evaluate the changes they have managed to bring about, and the changing contexts within which they work. Yet most of this monitoring and evaluating is done live, and in interactive ways which do not get written down.
- To develop and work with some monitoring and evaluation tools that may 'fit' better with the kind of work a network does. These include ways of assessing levels and quality of participation and linking, and the kind of evaluative questions we could be asking ourselves about relationships and trust.

A network has as its primary functions that of linking, co-ordinating and facilitating joint work. Monitoring and evaluation in this context must be about those functions. This research has almost deliberately stayed away from looking into how to monitor and evaluate advocacy *per se*. Significant work is being undertaken by Action Aid (see Chapman and Wamayo 2001), Roche (1999), Davies (2001) and others in the field. While this research has something to add to our understanding about how change is brought about in complex, volatile environments with a myriad of complicating additional factors, we have concentrated our minds on how to understand the nature of what a network does. Evaluating advocacy work in this context must try and understand the added-value that *linking* and *co-ordinating* bring to advocacy.

This report highlights the following aspects:

- The improved quality and sophistication of *joint* analysis that underpins the advocacy;
- The extended reach to key actors in key contexts through which that improved analysis can be channelled;
- The capacity to act simultaneously, with shared ideas, in many places at once;
- The space for competing views to be discussed and consensus positions achieved;
- The opportunity for those with few other avenues to powerful decision-makers to gain access through the networked relationships.

It is these criteria that we need to evaluate against if we are to capture the unique extras that networked advocacy brings.

It is organised in four main sections:

- Section One focuses on the background, the ideas, and the methodology
- Section Two examines Networks and what we mean by them
- Section Three highlights the importance of trust, relationship-building, and structure
- Section Four looks at the centrality of participation and its relationship to evaluation. It outlines the new approaches we have been working with.

Finally Section Five draws together the conclusions and some ideas for further exploration.

The research has been in large measure the result of the commitment and insight displayed by the following network co-ordinators and members of the Action Research Group at the centre of it: Kathleen Armstrong (CODEP), Priyanthi Fernando (IFRTD), Helen Gould (Creative Exchange), Sally Joss (IANSA), Manisha Marwaha-Diedrich (FEWER), and Ana Laura de la Torre (Creative Exchange).

The research was led by Madeline Church, with expert input on evaluation and facilitation from Mark Bitel of *Partners in Evaluation.* Claudy Vouhé of Development Planning Unit (University College London) managed the project. The report was written by Madeline Church, with the feedback from all the above at various points in the process.

SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND - IDEAS, METHODOLOGY

As professional network co-ordinators, working predominately in a networked way (with and within a range of international networks), the questions about what works and doesn't in our complex and changing environments are becoming ever more pressing. Many of us work nationally, and across the European Union. We work across boundaries and languages, and engage with myriad numbers of power-brokers, opinion-formers, officials, elected representatives, media, and others. We regularly analyse, discuss, and evaluate our work. What we rarely do is document the way in which we work, or spend time reflecting on what we might do better or differently.

In this context, the idea of working on the practice of evaluation within international, externally-funded networks arose. Concretely, we were asking ourselves how evaluation could be built into the practice of networks.

Our idea was to ask such networks about their evaluation experience, in particular what factors had either hindered them or enabled them to 'do' evaluation in their networks. We would then develop a more appropriate evaluation 'model', consult on it, and then trial it with a network. It was conceived under the rubric of participatory action research.

1.1 Why participatory? Why action research?

'Action research is at its best a process that explicitly aims to educate those involved to develop their capacity for inquiry both individually and collectively.' (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:10)

As a team, we are all committed to working for social justice and change in some form or other. Madeline Church's work as the co-ordinator of a small lobbying network on human rights, development and forced displacement in Colombia (ABColombia Group), is predicated on this value-base. Mark Bitel's facilitation work with self-evaluation in community organisations is built on a belief that organisations have the capacity and knowledge to evaluate their work, but are frequently confused by complicated and 'elitist' evaluation jargon and methodology. Claudy Vouhé works in a variety of international settings seeking to transform gender relations in institutions by helping those in those institutions to analyse, map and plan for systemic change. We were therefore clear from the beginning that our methodology needed to commit to that value base.

As Lincoln (2001) and many others have articulated (see Park, Fals-Borda, Kemmis, Reason, and others in Handbook of Action Research (2001)) action research grew out of a critique of social science and its inability to provide 'right' answers to persistent social problems. The 'detachment' or so-called 'objectivity' of social science research and researchers was critiqued as a 'failure to engage', specifically with those actually affected by policy change and intervention. It allowed a privileging of the perspective of academic elites over that of the ordinary participant. As such it maintained skewed power relations under the cloak of 'neutral science'.

'The technical rationality built into traditional forms of inquiry acts pro- and retro-actively to disenfranchize certain kinds of stake-holders, while undermining democratic values and privileging elites.' (Lincoln 2001:125)

'Advocates of participatory action research have focused their critique of conventional research strategies on structural relationships of power and the ways through which they are maintained by monopolies of knowledge, arguing that participatory knowledge strategies can challenge deep-rooted power inequities.' (Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:70)

In their *Handbook of Action Research*, Reason & Bradbury (2001) offer this working definition of action research:

'Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview... It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.' (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:1)

Participatory action research therefore joins together *research* (the gathering and interpretation of data) in pursuit of *action* (doing it differently or better), with an *understanding* of action (the data of practice), thus helping us to *reflect and make sense* (evaluate and theorise). This is built on an egalitarian belief that it is those involved in the action who must be involved in and determine the direction of the reflection, that those

seeking to generate new understanding of their particular context are the researcher-subjects. We are not looking for 'the truth' but hoping to gain greater knowledge as a result of bringing our plurality of experience together.

'Truths' become products of a process in which people come together to share experiences through a dynamic process of action, reflection and collective investigation. At the same time they remain firmly rooted in participants' own conceptual worlds and in the interactions between them.'(Gaventa & Cornwall 2001:74)

At its core, therefore, participatory action research not only 'does research differently' it has the power to challenge and change inequality. This 'challenge for change' is also at the core of what we are doing in much of our network work.

In forming networks across international frontiers and by linking together actors in different sectors and levels, in our work practice we are struggling to change such power differentials in pursuit of more equitable development. A network in this field responds to an innate issue of power. Small closed networks of decision-makers in the world are known to us all and deemed to be powerful, even if that power may be over-estimated. The network as it is currently conceptualised in the development sphere is often explicitly seen as a method of countering "embedded network" power; of enabling a greater diversity of voices to be heard, especially the historically marginalised, poor or powerless.

We have a profound belief that participation is at the core of what makes a network different to other organisational/process forms. An deep understanding of participation, how it is generated, moved, sustained, developed, increased, deepened, expanded, valued and lived is of critical and vital import in any work on networks. And any research on the topic needs to appreciate and commit to that, not just in its 'research question' but in its methodology.

This quotation on the characteristics of networks seems perfectly to illuminate why participatory action research is a natural approach in this context:
*'**participatory** and **non-directive** approaches, allowing for **locally meaningful** and **relevant** solutions to **emerge** in response to **local characteristics** and conditions. The networking process should ensure that responses are **meaningfully reflected** in people's daily lives.' Emphasis added (HIV & Development Programme & UNAIDS, 2000:7)*

As such the Action Research Group provided us with a space in which to dialogue and exchange, and in effect to create a networked community of practitioners asking similar questions. Our experience is as Park describes:

'Dialogue occupies a central position as inquiry...by making it possible for participants to create a social space in which they can share experiences and information, create common meanings and forge concerted actions together.' (Park 2001:81)

What we found through working in this way was a 'fit' between the ideals and values that had brought us to work in international networks in the first place, and a way to understand, ask questions and work together on suggesting ways forward. As network co-ordinators, the questions in this research were and continue to be threaded through almost every aspect of our work. Others in similar jobs have similar experiences.

1.2 Evaluation

We have approached this research through the lens of monitoring and evaluation. All the networks involved receive funding from external donors, and one of those is funding this research. Funders need to ensure that those receiving funds can demonstrate that it is money well spent, spent in pursuit of relevant and acceptable goals. Monitoring and evaluation is deemed to be able to respond to that demand.

More than that, however, we are dissatisfied with the methodology available to understand the value of working in networks. Standard planning, monitoring and evaluation methodologies have been found wanting by almost all the networks in Karl's (1999) collection.

While we did not work with a specific theory-based approach, there are two evaluation writers who have influenced our thinking.

- The utilization–focus of Patton (1999) appeals because of its pragmatic realism. The emphasis here is on use, and we were all concerned to develop useful materials. Particularly helpful is his work on revealing the underlying theory of change that we all have when we work. This theory is most clearly seen by the way we link goals, to objectives, to activities, what Patton calls a 'chain of objectives'. (Patton 1997:218) It is this we are using in the tool Weaver's Triangle for Networks.

- David Fetterman's (2001) Empowerment Evaluation approach matches, or 'fits' the network project at the level of values, and its emphasis on democratising the process through participation.

'It employs the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster improvement and self-determination. It employs both qualitative and quantitative methodologies... It is designed to help people help themselves and improve their programs using a form of self-evaluation and reflection.... This process is fundamentally democratic in the sense that it invites (if not demands) participation, examining issues of concern to the entire community in an open forum.' (Fetterman 2001:3)

Without 'doing' empowerment evaluation, our work is certainly in tune with much of what Fetterman proposes.

1.3 The Action Research - an emergent design

In many ways the only given about this kind of research is that the way to do it emerges during the process of doing it. The most important aspects are the emergent nature of the theory that we are working with, and the creative approach to methodology.

'Since action research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge, in many ways the process of inquiry is as important as specific outcomes. Good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process.. In action research knowledge is a living, evolving process of coming to know rooted in everyday experience; it is a verb rather than a noun. This means action research cannot be programmatic and cannot be defined in terms of hard and fast methods.' (Reason & Bradbury 2001b:2)

One of our explicit questions in proposing this research was 'how do you do research with networks?' It is hoped that this piece of work will throw some light on the complexity of how to do participatory research in this context. To some extent we did as Wadsworth suggests, as one of the six key aspects to facilitating forms of collaborative inquiry:

'identifying and bringing together all relevant participants or stakeholders through inclusive processes of 'organic' or 'naturalistic recruitment', and emergently knitting together inquiry groups and inquiry networks.' (Wadsworth 2001:426)

The most important development was the formation of an Action Research Group made up of network co-ordinators. Using the BOND register of NGO networks (funding restricted this particular research to working with those based in the UK) we contacted those listed. Using an initial questionnaire about their experience of evaluation, we invited co-ordinators to participate in an Action Research Group to look more deeply into the challenges of evaluation in a network. We gave ourselves the boundaries of 'international networks, externally-funded, who do more than just share information', as a way of concentrating our efforts and resources, and limiting our spread. We were also conscious that it was likely to be those with external funding who needed to respond to demands for documented evaluation of their work as a way of being accountable.

This group met 8 times over 15 months. We then 'made sense' of our recorded meetings, writing up synthesised notes and questions, and feeding them back to the Action Research Group.

We had a special session on evaluation, but mainly we sought to follow the questions that arose for us, always with evaluation as an underlying theme. We avoided complicated monitoring and evaluation texts and methodologies, preferring the pragmatic approach of working out what we needed to know and how to go about finding it out. The meetings benefited from a range of background reading and materials, including the sociological texts of Manuel Castells, writings from many disciplines on networks, organisational development literature, a body of work on trust in organisations, and evaluation methodology, practice and experience. Madeline Church was responsible for seeking out helpful theory and practice to enable us to understand, conceptualise and create new meanings. Mark Bitel brought in practical and extensive evaluation expertise.

*'Since action research shifts its focus as the inquiry develops, theoretical angles emerge during the process. The theoretical basis for the work cannot be determined in advance. Action research therefore cannot realistically aim to make an initial 'comprehensive' review of previous relevant knowledge; rather it must aim instead at being **flexible** and **creative** as it **improvises** the relevance of different types of theory at different stages in the work.' Theory, in action research, comes from 'a*

process of improvisation as we draw on different aspects of our prior professional and general knowledge in the course of the inquiry.' (Winter 2:1997, original emphasis)

Simultaneously, the core team circulated 118 more detailed questionnaires, in English, French and Spanish, to networks world-wide about their evaluation experience. We traced networks through contacts in development agencies, through the world wide web, through personal contacts and networks. We began to use the DPU web-site to introduce the project and placed the questionnaires onto the web.

Throughout the project we maintained contact with many people world-wide who had responded to the questionnaire, or who had heard about the work through other sources. We met with and talked to network co-ordinators in other countries in Europe, Africa and Colombia.

It became clear that our idea of developing a 'model' was not appropriate. The networks involved in the Action Research Group are all at different stages of development. We decided that we would work with each of the participating networks on an aspect of monitoring and evaluation that they/we needed to work on:

- With IANSA we worked on monitoring and developing evaluation criteria,
- with FEWER on how to build an evaluation framework consonant with their conflict framework,
- with CODEP on how to understand their participation levels,
- with Creative Exchange on building in an annual Contributions Assessment
- with IFRTD on structure
- with ABColombia on how to capture the story of change in one piece of lobbying work.

Lastly, Madeline Church worked with the International Working Group on Sri Lanka using some of the tools generated through the research.

So, the data used for this report has come from various sources:

- Discussions in the Action Research Group
- Analysis of published and unpublished materials on networks, network evaluations, and evaluation methodology generally
- From the evaluation work undertaken by the research team with those in the Action Research Group
- From questionnaires circulated through networks and web-sites to network co-ordinators about their experiences of evaluation
- From an evaluation done with IWG on Sri Lanka
- From dialogue with those working in networks, in the UK, Sweden, Brussels, Uganda, Caucasus and Colombia.

1.4 Challenges

The challenges of working in this way with networks and network co-ordinators are multiple. In many ways the obstacles and challenges faced by networks in trying to do evaluation, listed and discussed in the responses to our questionnaires, are mirrored here.

1.4.1 Time

No-one appears to have enough of it. While the responses we got to our initial call to participate were tremendous, with an almost uniform urgency about when the results would be ready for others to use, very few people had the time to commit to participating regularly in a group dedicated to looking at the pressing issues around evaluation. Network co-ordinators always seem to have an overload of work, which it is already a challenge to prioritise. Those who committed to the Action Research Group needed to 'show results', that their time was well-spent. Most found it exceptionally difficult to do anything more than participate in the two-three hour meetings, which meant that the job of collation, summary, interpretation and proposal mainly came from the facilitation team. In essence keeping the group going was a similar job of network co-ordination and facilitation, a network of network co-ordinators working on evaluation. As such it benefited from the insights we generated along the way, and was indeed 'emergent'. It was also very time-consuming (in time-terms the research was probably a year too short at least).

1.4.2 Participation - who participates, the quality and level of participation

Participation is the key word for the whole project. As far as who participated in the research project, we only managed to design a process in which network co-ordinators took a lead role. One of the most notable perspective deficiencies was that of network participants. To this extent we failed to bring in 'all' the stakeholders that Wadsworth talks about above.

Those who filled in and replied to the questionnaires were inevitably those who co-

ordinate or are in the secretariat of externally-funded networks. The evaluation dynamic and drive comes from these centres, largely because they have external funding. This is important because a repeating feature of all the conversations, interviews and discussions in the action research group is the difficulty all of us have in distinguishing between the Secretariat/ co-ordinator/hub of a network and the network itself. So while a Co-ordinator might answer our questionnaire in a certain way, it is by no means certain that the membership would concur, or even be bothered by the questions. So this research managed to bring into its circle network co-ordinators, but few who are the members of networks in this field.

Similarly we did not manage to get much input from donors. We asked those who filled in questionnaires to provide the names of their donors, in the hope that we would then be able to approach the donors with specific questions about their attitudes to evaluation of networks. In 39 questionnaire responses, 76 different donors were named. However, it soon became clear that without exact contact details and names of project managers it was going to be very difficult in the time available to find the relevant contacts in often very large donor organisations. It was also obvious from the questionnaires that those networks who had done evaluations had freedom to choose their consultants and terms of reference, and that these choices were not determined entirely by donors. Most used a standard methodology in the field (questionnaires, interviews, document review). We decided that the donor 'perspective', while important, was not critical to the project.

1.4.3 Facilitation

It is abundantly clear from this process that working in a participatory way with networks requires a significant amount of facilitation, just as facilitation of any network. In particular, being both facilitator and participant brings greater understanding. In many ways this was a pilot project, which included the process of generating commitment from other network co-ordinators to participate in the research. Any further work would now have a good core group to help design a more elaborate process with wider reach.

1.4.4 The scale

Inevitably, the scale of the research has outstripped our capacities within the confines of this project. Just as the subject matter we are working with – networks and their work – has an organic and almost boundless quality to it, so this project has generated far more questions and further avenues for exploration, revealed links and connections that are simply beyond what it has been possible to take on in the time available.

1.5 Benefits

We were successful in developing and sustaining a small group of network co-ordinators and building a small community of inquiry with a high quality of thought and reflection on what working in a networked way means. It gave those of us who facilitate such working much needed space and time together to exchange experience, deepen our understanding and generate new ideas. This was perhaps its most important achievement, shared by all of us. The quality of this report, and the ideas it contains, are one significant result of that participatory process.

SECTION TWO: NETWORKS - WHAT DO WE MEAN BY NETWORKS?

2.1 Introduction

Throughout our discussions in the Action Research Group we have been aware that we needed greater insight into and understanding of even what we mean by a network, before we could begin to develop appropriate ways to monitor and evaluate what we do through them. How do we conceptualise networks? What images help us? How do we link that meaning to the process we actually participate in when we're in it?

2.2 The Network Society

For Manuel Castells (2000), the advent of what he calls the 'network society' is harbinger of nothing short of a revolution. The development of information technology is enabling the social practice of networks and networking, in itself an old and well established tradition of human interaction (personal links, solidarity, reciprocal support), to mobilise resources on a global scale. This is having and will continue to have a seismic impact on the way we organise ourselves in societies, states and polities. Nation states are already giving way to supra-national coalitions and representation at the national level is in a crisis of meaninglessness. More decisions are taken globally yet people's interests are relocating either in the very local or the themeatic. Nation states are 'either bypassed or rearranged in networks of shared sovereignty formed by national governments, supranational institutions (such as the European Union, NATO or NAFTA), regional governments, local governments, and NGOs, all interacting in a negotiated process of decision-making.' (Castells 2000:694) This is globalisation in action, 'the technological, organizational and institutional capacity of the core components of a given system (e.g. the economy) to work as a unit in real or chosen time on a planetary scale.' (Castells 2000:694).

This impact is profound, affecting our symbolic world, our organisational structures and our social processes. He sees the crisis of the nation state, a crisis of family and of patriarchy, as leading us to 'redefine sexuality, socialisation and personality formation', and reconstitute our social organisation. He believes new identities will be constructed through networks built around key themes and based in values. This will 'break up societies based on negotiated institutions, in favour of value-founded communes.' (Castells 2000:694)

Reinicke *et al* (2000) echo this thinking, suggesting the need for new structures and processes of global governance in a context of economic and political liberalisation, driven by the engine of advanced information technology. They argue that both operational and participatory gaps are becoming more apparent in such a globally-governed world. Operational in that public institutions lack the resources, information and tools to respond to the new order, and participatory in that increasingly civil society and the private sector demand a voice in the processes of decision-making and policy-making, and are accumulating the resources to insist that they are included. The challenge is to overcome these gaps.

What this means for the way we understand the world is similarly new. Castells argues that the network society demands a new sociology, one that joins analysis of social structure and of social action in the same analytical framework. He sees an opportunity to develop a sociology in which structure and action are seen through the lens of the network, providing a metaphor that encapsulates the dynamic, iterative, changing, interactive reality of both structure and action. This will involve a move from analysis through the separate lenses of centres-peripheries, hierarchies of organisation, and the theories of social change, to one in which structure and action operate within the same plane.

What is Castell's network? A set of interconnected nodes, flexible adaptive structures that can perform any task that is programmed in. This can expand indefinitely, incorporate any new node by reconfiguring, as long as a new node does not obstruct but adds value, 'by their contribution in human resources, markets, raw materials, or other components of production and distribution.' (Castells 2000:695) Networks based on alternative values have the same basic morphology, differing by being led and driven by values.

'Networks are dynamic, self-evolving structures, which, powered by information technology and communicating with the same digital language, can grow, and include all social expressions, compatible with each network's goals. Networks increase their value exponentially as they add nodes.' (Castells 2000:697)

Castells is useful in that he more than anyone has thought large about what the influence of

this new way of working, and I would say old way of interacting, actually means. Placed in this context, the challenge of this research looks suddenly huge and overpowering indeed. If we are looking at such a significant change in the way we see the relationship between structure and action - one we would argue actually brings our organisational tendencies into line with the old norms of personal interaction, a bringing together of public and private, a re-joining of the political and personal, the world of work and the world of play and love and gossip, what Castells calls 'structuralism and subjectivism' (Castells 2000:697) - we need to develop tools for holistic thinking and analysis that we have all but forgotten in our drive to separate out and categorise. He, like many post-modern thinkers, talks of a new paradigm, the withering away of the dominant Enlightenment paradigm. 'A deep ecological consciousness is permeating the human mind and affecting the way we live, produce, consume and perceive ourselves.' (Castells 2000:694). He seems to believe that the network society is the social expression of that consciousness.

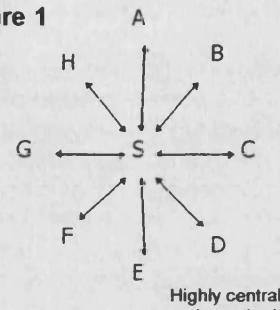
2.3 Network Typology

Many others have sought to, or decided not to put energy into definitions of types of networks. Most agree, at least implicity, on a few simple markers. A network can be called a network when the relationship between those in the network is voluntarily entered into, the autonomy of participants remains intact, and there are mutual or joint activities. (see Starkey 1997; Karl 1999; HIV and Development Programme & UNAIDS 2000; and others). These are markers about relationship, about power and about action.

Few agree on how to typologise. As Starkey says, people have attempted to do so according to their membership, their geographical scope, their activities, their purpose and their structure. (Starkey 1997:15). Or as can be seen below, through a combination of criteria. What follows are some of those attempts.

Starkey's gives us a series of network models (and some that aren't in order to emphasise the differences). His diagrams show how participants and coordination function link together in varying degrees of centralization or decentralization. The most centralized model has the coordination function controlling the communication through the centre, and no horizontal contact between participants (Figure1). The most decentralized involves contact within and between all participants, without central mediation. He describes the decentralized model as theoretically a perfect network. He concedes it might not be realistic (Figure 2).

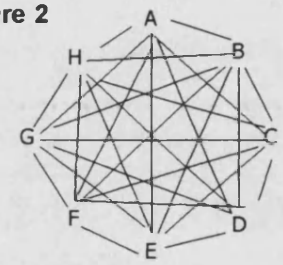
Figure 1



Highly centralised network. All have reciprocal relationships with secretariat but not with each other

Starkey 1997:18

Figure 2



All organisations linked to each other, without central facilitation

Starkey 1997:19

Karl's book brings together similar models, which she calls fishing net (threads linking nodes), the spider's web (threads linking nodes together with a central coordinating point) and the pyramid (similar to spider's web but with verticality built in). She also suggests that to capture the multidimensional nature of some networks they need to be imagined as organic clusters (Karl 1999:23).

Rhodes' policy network analysis, which really only looks at networks intending to influence policy, lays out a hierarchy of policy network types, from the most embedded and politically powerful at the top, to single-issue networks at the bottom. The former are considered to be stable and powerful structures whereas the latter are by nature unstable, fluid and with limited capacity for influence. (Bretherton & Sperling 1996:500-1). To some degree the distinctions are about the

extent of diversity of participants, and openness or exclusivity of membership. They are certainly about access to political power. Reinicke *et al* (2000), however, suggest that new Global Public Policy (GPP) networks are emerging, which are 'creative trisectoral arrangements' capable of loosening traditional power arrangements (Reinicke *et al* 2000:xi).

'GPP networks embrace the very forces of globalization that have confounded and complicated traditional governance structures, challenging the operational capacity and democratic responsiveness of governments. They are distinctive in their ability to bring people and institutions from diverse backgrounds together, often when they have been working against one another for years. Making use of the strength of weak ties, networks can handle this diversity of actors precisely because of the productive tensions on which they rest.' (Reinicke et al 2000:xxi)

They are, however, challenging when it comes to typology.

'Having developed in the shadow of traditional multilateralism, GPP networks are protean things, difficult to define or typologise. This is so because they have grown up largely independently of each other to serve widely differing purposes.' (Reinicke et al 2000:xi)

HIV and Development Programme & UNAIDS (2000) makes its main distinction along the lines of the purpose of the network. Is the network's core purpose one of capacity-building (enhancing skills, understanding, capacities, of network beneficiaries) or is its core purpose task-oriented, outward-looking and activity-based (aiming to change specific policy, get an issue on to the political agenda, raise awareness)? (HIV and Development Programme & UNAIDS, 2000:7) The categories are in essence about direction of energy.

Holti & Whittle (1998:44) distinguish between a 'broker network' and a 'thematic network' in which the roles of the hub or coordination point are different. In large measure this distinction boils down to the role the 'hub' plays. In playing the role of a 'broker' in a broker network, it has expertise and a formal representational role. In a themeatic network, the hub operates as a facilitator and organiser of events, a trend spotter, generating learning and enthusiasm in the membership. This has some parallels with the 'advocacy' and 'capacity-building' split above.

Allen Nan (1999:17) offers us a vision of membership and structure and their relationship to participation and purpose. Smaller numbers of participants can do more difficult work together, larger numbers have more visibility. Greater structure (more committees, coordination hubs, etc) allows for greater size, communication and geographical spread. Less structure will need stronger personal relationships. Whether development is bottom-up or top-down will influence levels of participation, as will levels of central or decentralisation. The more top-down and centralised, the more you trade off participation for efficiency, speed and leadership.

Anne Bernard (HIV and Development Programme & UNAIDS, 2000:6-7) takes the approach of looking for characteristics that are common. She sees the relational as the core.

- a venue for social interaction through exchange and mutual learning
- member-ownership and interpersonal commitment to shared objectives and means of action
- capacity for responsive adaptation in the face of variable local contexts, including opening opportunities, creativity, and risk-taking
- cost-effective, since they involve a pooling of resources

Karl (1999) starts from the motivational, identifying the *whys* behind the choices people make to organise in this way, rather than concentrate on the structural form. In the main she sees networks forming out of conferences or meetings, or emergency responses to danger. Once people have worked together on something, they see the need or desire to continue to do so. She highlights four reasons, or *whys*: information sharing; advocacy; capacity-building and greater participation/less hierarchy. She spells out the added value of networks for those involved in them: dialogue across diverse groups, ideas-sharing, addressing global problems through global action; overcoming isolation, increasing potential for political or social action; respecting diversity, linking the international to the local; being inclusive; flexibility and responsiveness; capacity to do more together than alone.

Soderbaum (1999), in his study for Sida on African research networks, takes social network theory as his starting point, emphasising that 'networks are to be understood as vehicles by which social trust, communication and co-operation can be established and developed.' (Soderbaum

1999:2). His definition is drawn from the social understanding of how networks and networking form a part of all human interaction, and places value on the links and relationships between the participant 'nodes'. 'A social network is perhaps best understood as an informal, voluntary based, dynamic and borderless open system which is flexible, fluid, adaptable and susceptible to innovations, new ideas and needs without that [sic] its internal balance is threatened.' (Soderbaum 1999:3)

2.4 Our struggle for definition

While it was not the intention of this research to put energy and time into 'typologising', rather to investigate *the challenges of our practice,* it became clear early on in the research that we were and continue to be in a struggle with our definitions of ourselves. We have consistently come up against the question 'What, or who, is the network?' As co-ordinators we regularly confront the confusion between 'the network' and 'the co-ordination hub, or secretariat'. They get conflated, intertwined and overlaid. Sometimes in our conversations the word network becomes synonymous with the secretariat function, and the participants, members, or partners (who collectively are the network) get forgotten. Kathleen Armstrong, Codep co-ordinator, says that she makes a conscious effort to remind the participants in her steering committee that the co-ordinator is **not** the network, the network is the whole of the participant parts. She reframes their sentences when they adduce the functioning and therefore the network to the co-ordinator. They say 'You are going to need to do x'. She reframes as 'We are going to need to do x, who can do it?' Such experiences infuse all our discussions.

P: the secretariat is not the network, it is the servant of the network, it services the network

M: the thing is is that the servant often becomes the driver, because the power is invested into you, because you are there now, when you weren't there it had to be driven from lots of different areas, but now it is together enough to get a coordinator to do the day-to-day stuff that others don't have time to do, and so the responsibility gets dumped, or given to you and then you beome the driver and the servant of that network.

M: It depends of the level of responsibility is given to this driver, it might be like the driver of a plane, or a train or a tram.
(From Action Research Group 5 Notes, 2001)

In one complicated and rather tortured conversation with a colleague we spent a lot of time trying to determine whether her organisation was a network, or not, or a hybrid, or what it was, especially given that it is also a charity and a limited company. It appears that the decision to register it as a company was taken in part because the very informality or unstructuredness of the network format led to confusions about responsibility, representation, and rights. Some members believed that they could speak in the name of the network, for the network, hold workshops in the name of the network. In real ways they were the network, despite not necessarily being supported in that action by all members. Others thought the central coordination function had taken too much power and had itself become the network, not just an instrument of the network.

Looking at it another way, our confusion could be seen in terms of a struggle to separate structure from activity. This is an obvious confusion when we think that network (structure) and networking (activity) are often interchangeably used.

C: I find in the gender field for instance that people will talk about 'networking and building alliances' and it seems important to make a distinction, because I think the whole idea of building alliances, contains that idea of working on a common project or idea, it is focused on achieving something. Whereas networking has a broader kind of objective. (Action Research Group 5 notes)

It feels as if we are wrestling with exactly Castells' question: how do we bring together our understanding of social action and social structure in a coherent whole? How do we think holistically?

In the Action Research Group, participation has been our recurring theme, helping us to think holistically. In a sense what we have been developing through the work is a framework of participation. We have a profound belief in our group that participation is at the core of what makes a network different to other organisational/process forms. Who participates (issues around power, and resources), how they participate (issues about relationship, coordination, facilitation, governance) why they participate (issues around vision, values, needs, benefits, motivation, commitment), and for how long (issues around sustainability).

The markers identified above, about relationship, power and action, have helped us to talk about the work.

2.5 An emerging concept

'The Atom is the past. The symbol of science for the next century is the dynamical Net. ...Whereas the Atom represents clean simplicity, the Net channels the ***messy power of complexity****..The only organization capable of nonprejudiced growth or unguided learning is a network. All other topologies limit what can happen. A network swarm is all edges and therefore open ended any way you come at it. Indeed the network is the least structured organization that can be said to have any structure at all. ..****In fact a plurality of truly divergent components can only remain coherent in a network. No other arrangement – chain, pyramid, tree, circle, hub – can contain true diversity working as a whole****.' (Kevin Kelly quoted in footnote, Castells, 1996:61. Emphasis added)*

At the level of the overarching and conceptual, this quote inspired us because it reaches the real distinctive power of the network form, and the nature of its evolution. Suddenly, here is the true challenge of participating in a network. 'True diversity working as a whole', differences leading to coherence, the 'messy power of complexity.'

This somehow feels close to the following 'real world' description by a Ugandan AIDS Control Programme manager:

'a network can bring institutions together, put the situation on the table and then help them work through how they can move. Each will then work out responses which suit itself, but are coherent overall. The network co-ordinates, facilitates and advocates, and different organisations can access its agenda in their own ways. In this way, the network can be as wide as the problem is, day by day.' (HIV and Development Programme & UNAIDS, 2000:26)

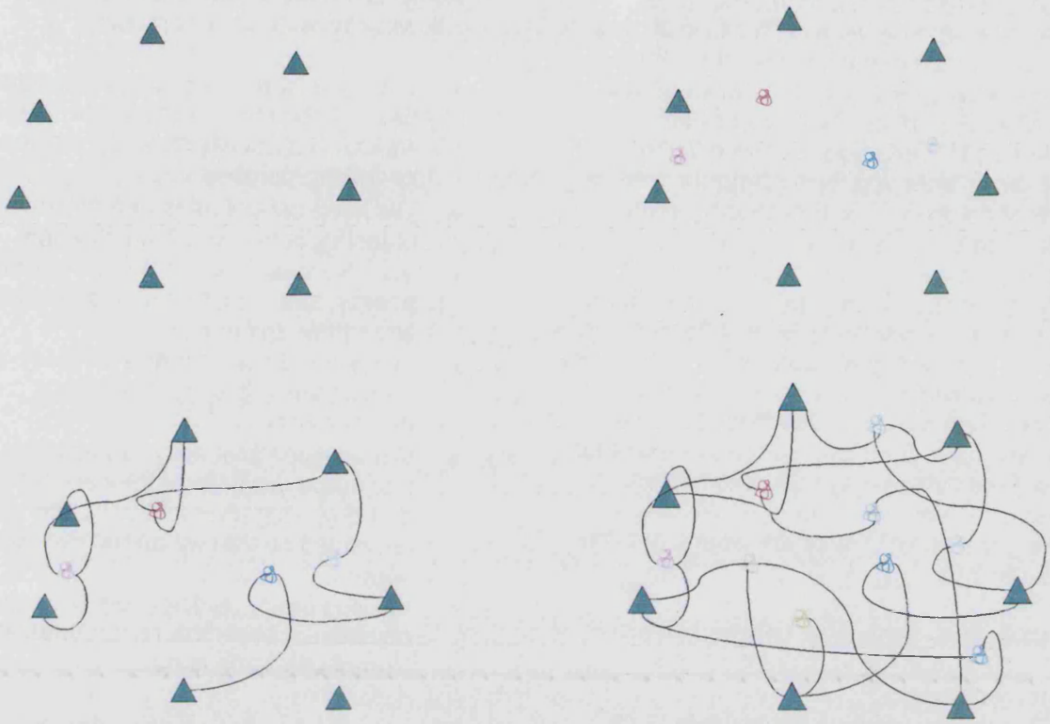
Despite the variety of network models that Starkey offers, or Karl, they seemed to be missing part of the whole. We needed an image and a concept to help us to differentiate the dynamics of a network from those of other organisational structures. One that reflects the interplay of relationship, trust, communication, and activity.

2.6 Threads, knots and nets - a network image

A network is based on the relational. This is the process that gives the network its strength. The common purpose is what makes it a network, not simply networking. We are in pursuit of something joined, something together. And then we are doing, we are engaging in an effort to realise that goal. It is the joint activity that gives us edge and power.

Figure 3 **Threads, Knots and Nets**

The triangles represent the members. The threads stand for the relationships, the communication and the trust. The knots represent what we do together, what join us. **It is the relational, engaged in the creational, that makes the structure.**



The threads tie us to each other through our joint activity and create the strength to hold us. (Figure 3) The coordinator, or secretariat is the artisan. Keeps the net in good order, knows which knots are best for what, notices the breaks, the fraying threads and seeks to renew them.

Threads, knots and nets - the body, the work and the structure of a network.

- The threads give the network its life. The threads link the participants through communication, friendship, shared ideas, relational processes, conflict, information. The participants spin these threads out from themselves. They voluntarily participate.

- The knots are where the threads the participants spin meet and join together. They are the joint activities aimed at realising the common purpose. These knots of activity make the most of members contributions, commitment and skills. They provide benefit and energy and inspiration.

- The net is the structure constructed through the relationships and the joint activities, a structure which allows for autonomy in community, a structure which participants create, contribute to and benefit from. The structure provides solidarity without losing identity, and is dynamic enough to incorporate new participants and expand without losing its common purpose. The structure is light, not strangling.

- The threads are given tensile strength by the knots that tie them together, and those common activities lead to greater trust, community, relationship.

- The coordination of such a structure can be imagined as a job of inspiration and of maintainance and repair. Of seeing the 'true diversity' and helping it to 'work as a whole'. Watching out for broken threads, knotting together appropriate activities, putting out new threads to new participants, extending the net. Working the net. Net workers.

This concept stays true to the idea of diversity, coherence, and the capacity for growth, without losing sight of the action. In the real world of practice and implementation, it is the activity (beyond the communication, information-sharing, relationships.) that gives the network its meaning. It also gives the network a living feel, one dependent on the commitment and input of its participants. It enables us to capture the sense of a dynamic, responsive, emerging form, using the messy power of complexity, and autonomy in the whole. And in some way it responds to Castell's urging for a way to analyse the merging of social action and social structure.

To return to practice, Robert Chambers in his work *Whose Reality Counts?* (1997), urges us to follow some basic principles if we are to really change the dynamics of the way we work. We have lifted and extended these four words from him as they seems to capture perfectly the creative spirit of a network working at its best. These are what a network should foster:

- Diversity – interaction between diverse opinions and ideas is creative and progressive
- Dynamism – freeing participants to be dynamic and propositional. Keeping structure light and facilitative, enabling, supportive
- Democracy – decision-making seen to be fair, inclusive and effective and only applied to the essential - to keep the net working. A shared vision developed by all.
- Decentralisation – the specifics of the local
- can be celebrated and enjoyed in the global

For us it is clear that in order to make this real, we need to consolidate and strengthen the following aspects of our practice

- We make sure the broad consensus, the highest common denominator, the most we can realistically strive for, is clear. The co-joining purpose
- We keep central rules to a minimum – the objective is to support not strangle
- We give trust-building and relational work priority, status and time. It is this that will strengthen the threads
- We make dynamism and diversity goals in themselves – it is this that brings creativity into our work
- We envision joint activities as more than just output activities – they are the knots that tie us together that keep the web tensioned so that we all receive some support
- We see input, participation, as a central objective – based on an understanding of 'contribution-brings-gain'

This, maybe, is what we should be hoping to illuminate, track and value through our **monitoring and evaluation processes.** This is profoundly different from other organisational forms and approaches. The way we work together in networks, and what we do together, influences the structure. The structure expands to encompass the reach we need.

SECTION THREE TRUST – HOW RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING AND STRUCTURE INTERACT

3.1 Introduction

Across the literature, either in the development field or the organisational development literature, all agree that trust is of paramount importance when examining the network form.

This section looks at how the concept of the network that we have developed is sustained by relationship-building and trust. The intention is to find a way to talk about how trust, values, activities, structure and people interact, a way that is useful to us in our practice.

The network web is constructed through several relational processes. Participants contribute to a shared project with time, expertise, contacts, and information. They gain benefit from the pooling of others' expertise, access and resources. This happens in ways that respect their autonomy in decision-making and collaboration, and value their diverse views, mandates and institutional priorities.

These processes reflect what Ebers & Grandori call *'beacons in the sea of network analysis.' (Ebers & Grandori, 1997:271)* They conceptualise network formation in relational terms, seeing the network and its structure as something that grows out of the relationships that we form, rather than giving primary importance to the transactions between us. Their language is a language of flows and movement. They suggest three intersecting flows: the flow of resources and activity; the flow of mutual expectations; and the flow of information.

These 'beacons' are helpful in that they resonate with the work we have been doing in the Action Research Group. Their 'mutual expectations' between participating members can be matched to our understanding of contribution/benefit, or the in-out flow. The resources and activities flow are similar to the 'advocacy and influencing' joint initiatives, and the circulation and sharing of skills and ideas. Their third category is information flow, the on-going flow of analysis and material which keeps us all in the loop.

We converge in the importance we place on relationship, activity, reciprocity and information.

They also see the inter-organisational network as a being that undergoes constant evolution. It shifts and changes as the 'flows' fluctuate and respond to the contextual pressures, and the evaluations participants are constantly making.

'Inter-organizational networking is subject to dynamic evolution because over time the forms, outcomes and actors' evaluations of inter-organizational networking change due to inherent development processes. The dynamics driving these development processes originate..in the specific outcomes of networking. These outcomes change over time the (pre)conditions for networking. Through processes of revaluation, learning and adaptation, they may thus lead to adjustments, and sometimes the termination, of the originally implemented ties and forms of inter-organizational networking. The development dynamic thus has the structure of a feedback loop.' (Ebers & Grandori, 1997:275)

The outcomes of the networking are being constantly evaluated and re-evaluated, and that evaluation changes the nature of the ties, the network, on which the networking is based. This in turn affects the outcomes. Thus the evaluation process affects the outcome, just as the evaluation of the outcome affects the process of the work.

What we have here is a relationship between activity, reflection on that activity, and the adjustment to the relationships and action as a result of that reflection.

3.2 The individual

What is more obvious in our concept is the primary importance of the individual, the participant. What impacts significantly on the activity-reflection-adjustment loop is the relationships that exist and evolve between those people doing the activity, the reflecting and the adjusting. The quality of those relationships enable or disable the processes of acting together, reflecting together and making changes together. In these relationships the individual person, rather than the institution who they may represent, is the primary agent.

For those of us working inside activity-focused networks, this cannot be overstated. Personal relations make or break the work. In an environment where there is no hierarchy, if you don't get on, the work may not even get done. In the light of the above, and as participants in networks, we need to pay serious attention to our own individual behaviours, to our attitudes to authority and power, and examine our norms of decision-making.

In the Action Research Group we have talked about the responsibility we have for examining and changing our attitudes. In

Chambers' words 'What sort of people we are and how we interact are fundamental to learning and action.' (Chambers 1997:76) Chambers questions why it is that university development courses do not tackle issues of personal responsibility and behaviour, when this has such an impact on the work that people do and the way they are perceived by those they work with. (Chambers, 1997:208-9) This is even more important in networked working. This quote from an evaluation report highlights just how individuals' attitudes to authority, leadership, and conflict can begin to paralyse effective networked relationships.

'there is a marked reluctance to confront the issue [of personality] openly and on the personal basis that it needs. This tyranny of the personality is further complicated by its flip-side: the abdication of responsibility by the many – always expecting, encouraging the leader to take charge, then 'enjoying' the privilege of disowning unpleasant decisions, enjoying the role of uninvolved critical bystander – always knowing what should have been done better but never attempting to do it. These two negatives feed on each other and can serve to effectively block the process of democracy, while still capable of presenting a façade of participation to anyone who does not know this game well.' (Network T)

Taylor, in his paper which questions hard the value of 'measuring empowerment' advocates 'relationship assessment'.

'As important as the nature and quality of relationships with others, is the quality and nature of relationship with self. Although this might sound strange at first, we do relate to ourselves. We feel and act in certain ways towards ourselves. Our relationship with ourselves constitutes our basic orientation towards the world. We can feel essentially assertive or victimised; competent and in control, or perpetually undermined and exploited; confident and affirmed, or insecure – not only in specific relationships with others, but within ourselves. The ability to assess these internal relationships, and measure change over time, forms another important part of development practice.' (Taylor 2000:6)

At another level, as it is the individual who is the primary agent in the relationships necessary to sustain the network, institutions and networks find that when individuals leave, those relationships must be built anew. It is exceptionally hard to 'institutionalise' network relationships if we acknowledge that in their essence they work through reserves of trust.

3.3 Structures

'Putting in place formal integration mechanisms will not guarantee the development of the more informal integration mechanisms which underpin the emergence of at least companion and competence trust.' (Newell &Swan (2000):1321)

It is clear from the reading that there is a fairly common structure which most externally-funded networks tend to operate with. A small co-ordinating secretariat or co-ordinating office, and a committee (advisory, management, executive, representative are some of the names used) which is drawn from the membership. This committee will tend to have some kind of representative spread (whether real or imagined) , and may 'co-opt' others to participate who are deemed to have something to offer. The general participant group may meet once a year to set general strategic objectives and then delegate the more regular monitoring and management to the 'committee'. With larger networks that cover several countries or regions there is often a set of 'national' or 'regional' coordinations.

However, networks develop in ways that reflect the issues they are working with, the level of resources available and commitment to the core purpose. What seems to be the case is that as more people or organisations 'join', the structures tend to require review. The structure may display tensions around representation, agility and flexibility, confusion around where decisions are taken, by whom and why, and how far the co-ordination mechanism has autonomy and how far it takes its work from the 'committee'. Those networks seeking to influence policy-makers, with a political role, are more likely to find themselves concerned about representation and autonomy of secretariat.

The structure on paper tends to be more 'organised', and representative than it may be in reality. Given the voluntary nature of participation in the network form, those most interested in participating, those who see a more obvious 'fit' between their own work/organisation and that of the network, will tend to play a more active role than those more tangentially related. A national co-ordination or network connected to an international one may give the impression of a greater level of coherence and co-ordination than actually exists.

On the whole, these structures tend to be represented as variations on nodes connected together: in a web, a pyramid, a wheel, a cluster. Some of these were reproduced in

Section Two. One of the few exceptions is that of Women Living Under Muslim Laws, who conceptualise their network as a spiral, 'a non-membership fluid network which has a non-hierarchical structure with decentralised decision-making and wide consultation.' They still have co-ordination offices, a Core Group and a Co-ordination Group, which draft Plans of Action which the Co-ordination offices implement. However, the image they draw of their network is not based on their structure but on their values. For them the spiral represents linkage, facilitation, solidarity, two way flows, diversity, support, consultation and inspiration.

'We draw inspiration from each other, share common objectives and in addition to activities carried out locally, work together on common projects.' (Karl, 1999:41)

3.4 Structure and Trust

'One thing is clear about network organisations, colocated teams, strategic alliances and long-term supplier relations: control is not exercised in the form of hierarchical authority.' (Sheppard & Tuchinsky, 1996:142)

'network organizations are self-regulating. Members, not a centralized source of power, are responsible for developing a vision, mission and goals for initiating and managing work activities. Members share their understanding of issues and devise ways to relate to each other in carrying out the work necessary to bring about a shared vision of the future. This vision provides the context that orients all network activity. Retaining this orientation is critical to developing and maintaining networks.' (Chisholm, 1998:6)

In an organisation of peers, trust is the key.

'It takes a long time to build trust, and it has to have a component of personal contact. But once built it operates like strong glue. It's a very big thing to lose, once you have it you don't want to break it.' (Interview with IANSA Co-ordinator)

Trust makes it possible for participants to delegate and for the decision-making structure and committee to get on with it. Limited trust, dwindling trust, impacts heavily on structure and governance. For Chisholm, above, a network is a self-regulating form. For that to work, the vision must be shared and understood. Members build relationships with each other in order to advance toward that vision, through activities.

Diminishing trust tends to occur when the vision is contested, needs revisiting, or lacks clarity. Increased 'control' is often seen as a way of compensating for the lack of trust, and can result in greater and greater emphasis on rules and mechanisms for control. Individual personalities and their attitude to power, decision-making and control are critical factors in whether trust grows or withers. However, taking authority is also seen as hierarchical control and resisted. Those delegated to make decisions are often tentative, fearful even, while those delegating can be critical and controlling. In a network, trust, fostered through shared vision, values and activities, is the control.

M: I was surprised that it was easier to find common ground than could be imagined from outside. It is easier if they can talk about themes or projects rather than structure. Conflicts are worse when we start to talk about structure and governance, the question of membership, who and how, what the policy is for entering the network, formally defined obligations, how many projects or meetings, (Action Research Group 5 notes)

We begin to glimpse how structure and trust interact, and how the structural is often given greater weight or priority than the relational. This is true in the typologising, and is true in the energy given over to it in the practice. When the relational is under strain, network members may take refuge in discussions about structure and governance, and reach for structure instead of believing that structure will emerge from the relationships. An evaluation may be commissioned in order to suggest alternative structures.

3.5 Trusting trust and collaboration

What of trust? How does an understanding of trust help us to see what kind of structure we need?

Newell & Swan in their three year study of trust and inter-organisational networking between research institutions, make distinctions between three types of trust:

- Companion trust: this is the trust that exists in the context of goodwill and friendship
- Competence trust: this is where we trust in others' competence to carry out the task agreed
- Commitment trust: this is a trust made fast by contractual or inter-institutional agreements, ones that can be enforced. (Newell &Swan 2000:1295)

It may be that such categories are useful analytical tools to help us to understand what kind of trust we are hoping to build. In the environment we are working in, we are familiar with companion and competence trust. We understand that we will tend to make allowances for those who are good at their job, even if we don't like them or get on with them, and will tend to gloss over the incompetencies of friends. What Newell and Swan call commitment trust is less obviously present, although we would argue that it could be redefined as the agreement around core values, mission and overall aims.

What Sheppard & Tuchinsky (1996) call identification-based trust, trust generated out of shared values, maybe more helpful in this regard. It requires the greatest investment, but they argue, 'the rewards are commensurably greater. The benefits go beyond quantity, efficiency and flexibility'. The benefits they describe indicate that low levels of control are possible, because it is trust that permits us to let go.

'When an identity-based relationship exists, it is possible for one's partner to act in his or her stead. Thus just as knowledge-based [capacity to understand and predict what other will do] and deterrence-based trust [existence of deterrents] allow a person, group or firm to become more ***dependent*** *on another person, group or firm, identity-based trust makes it possible for a person, group or firm* ***to permit a partner to act independently – knowing its interests will get met.'*** *(Sheppard & Tuchinsky, 1996:145 Emphasis added).*

The importance of this cannot be over-estimated. We move from an understanding of relationships as control and dependency to the possibility of freedom and independence in the pursuit of common interests. We liberate ourselves through trust.

Yet trust does not build itself. It is something that needs to be part of the process work of a network. Powell (1996) argues that trust is a resource that must be used and reflected upon, monitored and revisited, in order to keep it going:

'Trust and other forms of social capital are moral resources that operate in fundamentally different manner than physical capital. The supply of trust increases, rather than decreases, with use: indeed, trust can be depleted if not used.' (Powell 1996:52)

What sustains trust is regular contact, dialogue, and monitoring (Powell 1996:63). It is also sustained by the very act of collaborating together. The co-operative act is not simply a result of trust already built, it is also a method for generating trust. Trust can be a product of the very business of co-operating. Or as Network U puts it:

'In a co-ordination space we may want to reach agreement about many or few points, about basic issues, or about philosophies and strategies. This desire can lead us to think we have created greater levels of agreement than in fact is the case. It is something you cannot achieve by discussion, it comes from the trust which joint work brings. Co-ordination spaces have their own dynamic that can develop toward greater or lesser integration over time. The quality of the trust which each entity has in the space depends on the levels of co-operation that you manage to achieve.' (Network U)

If we believe this to be true, then trust can be generated out of the work networks do together.

3.6 What structure?

'too loose a structure .. drains potential and continuity, and too heavy a structure .. stifles initiative and innovation.' (HIV and Development Programme & UNAIDS, 2000:28)

'Network structure must not only be satisfactory in substance, it must also develop through relationships and processes that satisfy network participants. Therefore, issues of network structure such as representation, finances, and governance must be addressed through iterative consideration in a participatory fashion as the network takes shape.' (Allen Nan 1999:15)

So that's the challenge.

It seems much easier to analyse what trust exists and find the limits of it, than to think through ways in which trust can be expanded and consolidated, and how structure can be built around relationships, vision and action.

There are a number of writers on the subject who concur in the need for low levels of formal control, with high levels of co-ordination and facilitation.

'The analogy to be explored for human society is not centralization and many complex rules but decentralization and a few simple tendencies or rules, are the conditions for complex and harmonized local behaviour.' (Chambers 1997:195)

Fairclough (1994, referenced in Newell & Swan 2000:1320) advocates low levels of control to stimulate creativity, and high levels of co-ordination for integration. This feels like it mirrors Chambers' notions of decentralisation fostering dynamism.

'..diversity, complexity, creativity and adaptability will be greatest at the local level with an appropriate minimum of regulation to enable individuals to know what the rules are and what is happening, so that they can collaborate creatively.' (Chambers 1997:195)

Karl Wieck describe this in terms of maintaining 'tight control of core values and beliefs [which] allows for local adaptation in centralised systems' (quoted Stern 2001:10).

This respects what Freedman and Reynders (1999) call the 'premium' placed by networks on

'the autonomy of those linked through the network.....networks provide a structure through which different groups – each with their own organizational styles, substantive priorities, and political strategies – can join together for common purposes that fill needs felt by each.' (Freedman & Reynders 1999:22)

It also feels like it pays the right kind of attention to what co-ordination can accomplish and generate.

In a review of four HIV/AIDS networks, the manager of the Ugandan AIDS Control programme noted:

'You don't need a very large structure; you need a full-time core group, some form of secretariat, which is able to organise core issues and then draw from existing expertise on an issue by issue basis. It should be able to have an eye on the ground, to do analyses, to bring people together and harmonise their expertise. It needs to be interdisciplinary. And it needs to let those who are its members feel a sense of belonging, a closeness with the problem. Otherwise, they will feel coerced when asked to do something for free. The key is to be spontaneous as new issues emerge, and members need to feel able to bring these in as they evolve.' (HIV and Development Programme & UNAIDS, 2000:28)

However, low levels of control demand that trust is present. Allen Nan (1999) concludes from her review of the literature on co-ordination and networking amongst conflict resolution NGO's that they will be '
most effective when beginning with loose voluntary association which grows through relationship building, gradually building more structure and authority as it develops. No NGO wants to give away its authority until it trusts a networking body of people that it knows.' (Allen Nan 1999:8)

3.7 Co-ordination and communication

'The most important role I had was to keep and increase confidence among Forum members. I understood very quickly that it is very difficult to create common ground between different participants.' (Interview with ex-Co-ordinator of Caucusas NGO Forum, Maxim Shevelev)

What is has been repeatedly confirmed during the course of this research is the central importance of relationships with others. When asked, almost everyone prefers to network and work together through face-to-face meetings. Email is functional and practical, but face-to-face is what people want. Face-to-face makes greater trust possible.

S: what has to be recognised is that people need to talk to each other and not just by email, there has to be face-to-face meetings built in.

P: People think that they can build relationships like that through the email and you can't

M: It's a different quality of relationship. The potential for trust was there but wasn't realised until key members met face-to-face. There was a level of trust, or respect for each other, and we believed people meant well, but we didn't have political trust, until we met. Trust and confidentiality. (Interview with member of Network S)

Much of this work of trust-building is in the day-to-day business of those of us who are paid to co-ordinate networks. In the Action Research Group, the kinds of words that we use to describe our work and the work of the networks we co-ordinate tend to be process and values-oriented. We see ourselves as facilitators, and consensus-builders. We mediate, and balance the tension between enabling the participants to do their work and enabling them to work together, while at the same time giving a 'quality of input' that could be considered leadership

For the membership of the Action Research Group, it is clear that this 'process' activity is central to the work of the network.

*'The core business of a network is **process**, that of **networking**, working with other points in the web. This process is diffuse, difficult to capture, a process that happens in the spaces and connection points, a process that belongs*

to the autonomous members and participants. These processes are formal and informal. Members fade in and out according to priorities, interests, conflicts. This is part of the norm of a network environment. The work of the co-ordinator or secretariat is built on process - relationship-building, facilitating, enthusing, enabling, circulating resources, adding value where needed....Looking at process activities and output activities together indicates that one cannot happen without the other, and that ***if the process activities (the relationship/trust-building) are faltering the output activities will become harder and harder to implement.' (Action Research Group 3 Notes 2001)***

3.8 Making sense

What it seems that we can draw from the above is that the interconnective tissue of a network is the trust that exists and grows between the participants, and it doesn't just do it by itself. Work has to be done. Part of that trust-building work is done by the co-ordination function, in a constantly engaged process of knowing the members, facilitating their interaction, helping them to be in connection with one another. **This work needs to be recognised as an explicit outcome of a network operating effectively.**

Part of that work can, however, be done through the co-operative act. The act of co-operating is generative. That act must be reflected upon and 'evaluated' and that process of evaluation will not only change the process of acting, but will alter the outcome next time. In this way the network grows, evolves, redefines itself, sheds skin and produces/reproduces. This co-operative act is born out of shared values, values that also need to be revisited and articulated over time. Trust based on these values allows the participants to liberate themselves from control relationships, and provides the light holding structure in which each participant can operate autonomously and remain connected to the shared project. The co-ordinator(s) facilitate and lead.

What we may need to help us make this real is an understanding of the investment and expertise needed to work in this form. Time needs to be dedicated to establish trust, which is likely to mean time taken out of the individuals' other work in their own fields (Newell &Swan 2000:1321). At least in the current climate we work in where participation in networks often means time on top of allocated work in a person's paid job. This in itself has implications for those funding, establishing and participating in networks. As we have often said in our Action Research Group meetings, those with most power and resources (time, money, influence) make the time to go to conferences and meet at each others' country houses, in order to build the relationships that allow powerful networks to flourish.

Harris et al (2000) suggest that those participating 'must be competent in network processes in order to find, join and participate fully in the activities of the network.' (Harris et al, 2000:231) Ebers & Grandori (1997) insist on the time needed for evaluation and analysis, 'otherwise important benefits of these forms of organizing – namely improved responsiveness and flexibility, more rapid and effective decision-making, and enhanced learning and innovation – cannot be achieved.' (Ebers & Grandori, 1997:282).

Newell & Swan caution us against the assumption that trust is built simply through good communication and interpersonal relationships, and they draw our attention to the underlying frameworks of understanding that a person holds, either lightly or tightly.. Their research indicates that in situations where people have differing epistemological perspectives, or underlying frameworks, increased communication may only serve to highlight the differences. (Newell & Swan 2000:1320) In our work this may be true about values. It is at the points where the values clash that the trust comes under real strain. And the more that clash is exposed, the less easy it is to work together, especially if those in the network are friends.

What is needed is a balance. While it is important to clarify and agree on underlying values, part of network working is to facilitate the joint working of diverse groups from differing sectors, levels and backgrounds. Networks of friends can become 'self-selecting oligarchies' (interview with member of IWG on Sri Lanka) with diminishing levels of creativity. It is one of the challenges of the form to find the balance between goodwill, trust in others' competence and a shared understanding of values.

Lastly, we may also need to develop a more sophisticated "relationship" vocabulary'(Taylor 2000:6), simply to enable us to talk about how we are in relationship. And any such vocabulary, to be of use to those of us working trans-nationally, will need to reflect a much deeper understanding of how relationships are built across cultures than we currently possess.

SECTION FOUR: PARTICIPATION AND EVALUATION

4.1 Introduction

Participation has been the central theme of the discussions in the Action Research Group. Our work on participation has led us to develop ideas about how to design evaluation that can capture participation in a network in a meaningful way.

*'Through its **non-directive leadership, facilitative management and effective use of members' respective expertise**, the Network was able to **create a sense of ownership among its members**. They expressed full rights and responsibility to make decisions and to take action. In turn, ownership reinforced **commitment, energy and creative action**.' (emphasis added, HIV & Development Programme & UNAIDS, 2000:33)*

Ownership, commitment, energy and creative action. This is a good definition of participation, at least in the network context. Non-directive, facilitative leadership, and the effective use of members' respective expertise help participation to happen. Participation builds the relationships, and forms the structure of the net that holds those relationships together. Participation – of people in setting the agenda and making the decisions that affect their lives – is both politically empowering and liberating. It is essential if we are to realise our vision of inclusive, respectful and creative development, in which we all get to live to our full potential.

If we are to capture the essence of a network and be able to demonstrate its unique contribution, we need to be able to monitor and explain participation. Network co-ordinators need to be able to show who is participating, how, when and for how long. Evaluations need to be able to demonstrate that participating in the network enhances what participants are doing, and that what they bring to the network enhances their work and the work of the rest.

4.2 Participation – what do we mean by it?

'Ownership and participation are two sides of the same coin' (Network T)

Participation is the most visible issue in the evaluations of networks reviewed for this piece of work. It seems many networks are confronted by the challenges of how to generate participation and sustain it, how to provide incentives, how to encourage greater diversity, how to enable those of a variety of languages and cultures to get involved, and how to manage a diverse range of capacities.

Much work has been done on participation and what it means. A quick look at just one literature review of the topic shows us the level of common understanding that exists about the value of participation.

Karl's (2000) literature review of monitoring and evaluation of participation in agriculture and rural development projects summarises a number of definitions of 'participation' used by projects and programmes across the world.

In the main they are definitions which emphasise the fundamentally political nature of what is meant by participation in the development context. Clayton et al say it most baldly:

'Participation is an instrument to break poor people's exclusion and lack of access to and control over resources needed to sustain and improve their lives. It is intended to empower them to take more control over their lives.' (Clayton et al cited in Karl 2000)

Participation as empowerment is well-understood and embraced in most of the networks we have come into contact with. Such liberating, empowering politics is a given, at least at the theoretical level.

In the Action Research Group, participation has moved around in our minds from being *action* (talking , listening, commenting on drafts, responding to questions, sharing information, acting simultaneously across geographical regions) to being *a value* (participation is democratising, it spreads equality, it opens the debate to those previously excluded) to being *a process* (it helps fair decision-making, it builds relationships). (Action Research Group 2 Notes, 2000)

These three aspects – action and process, underpinned by values – are what we consider to be the real essence of working in a network. This is what Priyanthi Fernando means when she says the IFRTD has a commitment to work in 'a networked and networking way'. The action and the process change each other, the process changes the action and the action feeds the process. The values are carried through both.

This most resembles a three level approach to defining participation by Oakley (summarised in Karl 2000): participation as contribution [action], in which people offer input; as organisation [process], in which

people organise themselves to participate and have influence over something; as empowerment, in which people gain power and authority from the act of participation [values].

Looking through and reviewing the evaluations of networks available to this research, four things stand out:

- The issue of participation by members comes up again and again.
- Few have good data about how participation in their network works
- Remarkably few evaluations have directly asked members why they do or don't actively participate in the network
- The recommendations that emerge out of concerns around participation levels are often linked to functional aspects of membership (types of membership, rates, incentives, or 'conditions')

Led by these thoughts, we started to develop some simple ideas to help us monitor and evaluate participation. What we wanted was to:

- understand the dynamism of a network through the levels of participation.
- make explicit what participants can bring to the network, the limits of that commitment, and therefore the 'available resources' that the whole has to share around.
- acknowledge the primacy of relationships
- build our capacity for facilitative, shared leadership
- trace the changes that happen when we lobby and advocate in linked ways. Together, the network uses the individual access that participants have to those with the power to change policy and influence development.
- recognise that in using that combined force, the network itself has power to effect change

4.3 Lack of clarity about what a network really is

"Perhaps one of the reasons why I haven't used [the network] is that I haven't seen how to use it..." (Participant in Network X)

In a number of the evaluations reviewed for this research, there is a surprising amount of real confusion among participants about what the network they are involved with is for, or what the point of being in a network actually amounts to. It has never occurred to them to contribute, they don't know how to contribute, and they don't know what's on offer in return. At the same time, increasing the level of contribution and engagement by members is seen by most network secretariats as a priority:

*'Since the major purpose is to facilitate the development of an information network.... **commitment** of the membership to contributions in this regard is of major importance. Since a third of the current membership already **contribute** ... the need to encourage similar commitments from other members should be viewed as a future priority.' (emphasis added, Network Z)*

The 'misperception' raised in this network is not uncommon

'a further problem was the misperception of networks solely as resource centres, to provide information, material, papers, rather than as forums for two way exchange of information and experiences.' (Network X)

This may stem from a general tendency to conceive of projects using the 'needs assessment' model. Projects are often established on a criteria of meeting needs. Meeting needs of beneficiaries, while common and necessary in many development projects, tends to obscure and confuse matters in a network. To be a network, and not simply a 'resource centre', learning and action happens as a result of what we all *put in*. This benefit/input relationship is what keeps the network alive and dynamic.

4.4 Tools for measuring dynamism

Given that our conceptual understanding of a network is based on its activity, its capacity for responsiveness and renewal of ideas, it seems important to be able to determine the level of dynamism, and the quality of that engagement. We need to make serious efforts to understand the reasons why participation increases or decreases, stagnates or surges.

We have developed a number of simple methods to throw light on how participation is working, what kind of participation people would like and what kind of contribution they would like to offer. We have tended to steer clear of structural responses (such as membership definition) based on the belief that people engage with networks through a mix of shared strategic objectives, resources and relationships. It is this we are trying to illuminate.

In order to help clarify our purposes for being in a network, and to move away from the 'meeting needs' model, we have begun to use several tools. They each have elements which overlap with the others. They are intended as simple ways to gain greater understanding of levels of commitment, of what people have to offer, and of how they might interlink.

1. Contributions Assessment
2. Weaver's Triangle for Networks
3. Channels of Participation

4.4.1 Contributions Assessment

The Contributions Assessment is the flip-side of a needs assessment, and is intended to reveal what people have to contribute, what they are willing to contribute, and in what time frame. It enables the network to see what resources it has access to, and how they might be shared, multiplied, or exchanged. This was developed and refined by the Action Research Group, and has been used in different ways by Codep, Creative Exchange and Fewer. Others who are just starting up networks, or who are doing evaluations (such as bassac and IWG on Sri Lanka) are also adapting and using the Contributions Assessment ideas.

The underlying premise of seeking out what people have to offer, rather than aiming to meet a need, has resonance with the *appreciative inquiry* school of action research (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett 2001). This is not simply a technique. It deliberately seeks to banish the problem-solving, deficit-model approach in favour of engaging with people's enthusiasm, energy and best-practice.

'Appreciative inquiry distinguishes itself from critical modes of action research by its deliberately affirmative assumptions about people, organizations, and relationships.' (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett, 2001:191)

It is premised on the belief that 'it is much faster and more straight forward to go through the front door of enthusiasm.' (ibid:191)

In terms of evaluation, the appreciative inquiry approach represents a deep-rooted challenge to the standard evaluation practice of identifying problems for which recommendations are made.

'The purpose of the discovery phase is to search for, highlight, and illuminate those factors that give life to the organization, the "best of what is" in any given situation. Regardless of how few the moments of excellence, the task is to zero in on them and to discuss the factors and forces that made them possible. Valuing the "best of what is" opens the way to building a better future by dislodging the certainty of existing deficit constructions.' (ibid:192)

We developed the guidance for Contributions Assessment (see Figure 4) in the light of discussions about moving away from the 'needs' deficit-model. This represents a significant shift in thinking. Using this approach it is hoped that members will recognise that they are the real 'resource centre' of the network.

4.4.2 Weaver's Triangle for Networks

Weaver's triangle, adapted for networks (see Figure 5) is intended to help network participants clarify and understand what the aims and activities of the network are.

4.4.3 Circles or Channels of participation

This is a way of capturing how people participate and how that participation changes and moves over time. Often the discussion or debate about participation centres around how to manage 'types of membership'. This may involve bringing in, modifying or dispensing with different categories of membership, each category bringing different benefits and requiring certain levels of commitment. Network X, for instance, talks about incentives:

'The issue of incentives at all levels needs consideration. Incentives for user participation are poorly defined. Examination of different levels of user participation may be one way to address this problem (i.e., full member; associate member etc. each with attendant levels of benefit and required input).' (Network X)

The danger here is that a 'structural' solution is sometimes sought, in which penalties are incurred for 'failing to participate'. The drive to secure greater participation can encourage a tendency to impose stricter 'conditions for membership' from the central secretariat. Network Y used an annual re-registration scheme in order to monitor levels of interest in the network and its newsletter. Members had to write a letter in order to be kept on the mailing list. This was seen as evidence of being an 'active networker'. However, the evaluation team concluded that:

Figure 4

CONTRIBUTIONS ASSESSMENT – A TOOL FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN A NETWORK

Guidance for gathering in the range of contributions that network members might make to a network

A network depends for its life and vitality on the **input** of members. Networks tend to grow out of conferences, seminars, conversations, joint projects, where people connect through common agendas and purpose and think that they can offer one another and the wider world something **better together than separately**. A secretariat helps to **facilitate** the exchange and connection between those who participate, and to **draw on and circulate** the resources of members for the greater good, and towards the achievement of the overall shared aim.

One of the key issues for network projects and for those who coordinate networks is **participation**. How members participate, why some participate more than others, how to encourage greater participation, how to 'measure' participation.
A contributions assessment seeks to add another layer to needs assessment approaches. Most of us working in development and human rights are used to the needs assessment approach, of establishing a base line of project end-user needs before the project starts. You can then evaluate the work against that baseline, seeing if needs have actually been met by the project.

A Contributions Assessment aims to find out what people might **contribute**.

It can then serve as a baseline for assessing **if the network enabled its members to contribute over time**, and how that contribution gave **added value** to the network.

Guidance for a Contributions Assessment

The underlying philosophy

A **network** thrives on the drive, commitment and passion of its members. It is the combination of **diversity** (many autonomous institutions and individuals) **and a common purpose**, which gives a network power and energy. It is thus vital for a network to know what resources its members have and would be prepared to contribute and share. The aim of a contributions assessment is to hook into where the energy lies for the members, and involve people through their passion and drive to make a difference.

- A contributions assessment maps what members believe they can contribute to a network project. We are not talking simply about financial commitment in terms of a grant, but human resources, activities, skills, and energy. Value is placed on the interest and willingness to contribute, not the size or extent of what members can contribute
- A contributions assessment pays attention to power differences, and obstacles to commitment
- A contributions assessment enables the network as a whole to see what resources it can draw on and where it might need to seek extra members or resources
- A contributions assessment enables members to be realistic about what they can commit to – they are asked to think carefully about what such a contribution means for them in terms of time and energy and resources.
- A contributions assessment gives you baseline information against which you can evaluate. It enables you to ask –has the network provided its members with the opportunities they wanted to contribute? Has it enabled them to share in what is already in the pot? Has it enabled them to participate in making a difference?
- Evaluation can be done on how successful the network secretariat or coordinator has been in shifting the resources around the network, and how far the facilitation structures of the network have enabled that exchange to occur.

How you might do a Contributions Assessment

- Keep it focused on **contributions** – we all find it a lot easier to articulate what we might need rather than what we can add. The needs will get articulated in other ways.
- Decide who your contributors are – general membership, donors, steering committees, national network coordinators, secretariat, ...
- Be clear about what your network is aiming for – its helpful to have a simple statement or diagram that presents what the network is for, to enable people to see how and where they can contribute (see Weaver's Triangle for Networks as an example)
- Provide specific examples of contributions – participation in a committee, designing newsletter, organising a conference, doing policy analysis, etc. This will help members to define where their expertise might fit in.
- Ask members to think carefully about what they would like to contribute and how they might deliver it.
- Find out what the secretariat or coordinating function can do to enable people to contribute more effectively.

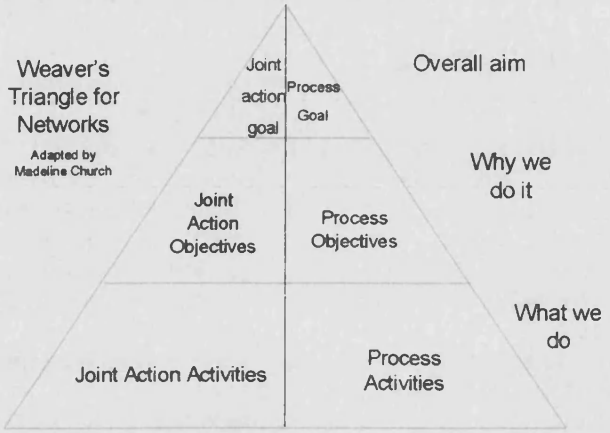
Figure 5

WEAVER'S TRIANGLE FOR NETWORKS

A simple way to clarify aims, objectives and activities

This tool is a simple exercise to distinguish ***what*** you do from ***why*** you are doing it. It helps you to see how you ***link*** what you do to why you are doing it, and what the ***underlying theory*** of your work is. Monitoring starts with the bottom section of the triangle. Evaluation in the middle.

This is a useful exercise to do with other people, as you can begin to see how your ***perspectives and understandings of the work*** you are doing either ***converge or diverge***.



OVERALL AIM

This tells everyone why the network exists and the *change* you wish to bring about. It summarises the difference that you want to make. Overall aims are general aims.

OBJECTIVES

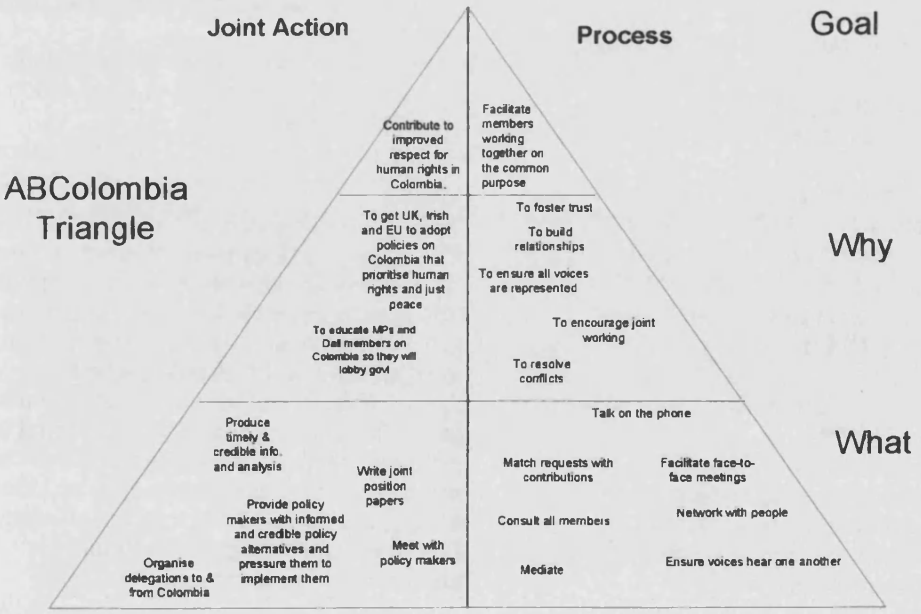
These are more specific statements about the differences the network hopes to bring about. There will usually be several, which will explain *why* you have chosen to do what you are doing.

ACTIVITIES

These describe the practical steps which you take to achieve the objectives. They say what the network will *do*. They are often called *outputs*.

Given that a central part of a network's work is that of facilitating the exchange and connection between members, the triangle is divided into two, to allow action aims and process aims to have equal weight.

Example (not all aspects are shown)



'the annual registration ...does not really serve that purpose very effectively and it has become a culling tool. While some [network] staff are happy with that, stressing the need for members to show on-going commitment, it does lead to a major loss of members every year, many of whom are unhappy about being excluded from the [newsletter]. It contributes to a loss in continuity of membership.' (Network Y)

People 'dropped off the tree' because of these regulations. They seemed to miss the realities of network working. People have to be sufficiently interested and engaged, and believe that working in this way will enhance their capacity to make a difference. Penalties and coercion have no place here.

The Circles of Participation idea comes in large measure from the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Health Network (LACWHN) (See SIDA 2000:131-155). They have three categories of membership which they use in order to ascertain the degree of commitment and interest.

R – those who receive the Women's Health Journal
P – those who participate in events and campaigns, and/or are contingent advisors for specific topics. They also receive Journal
PP – Active and permanent participant in Network at national and international levels. Also receive Journal.

However members shift from one category to another at any time, with inclusion in one or other category entirely contingent on their levels of participation, rather than on payment, or subscription. Such a framework enables them to assess both the growth over time of the network, and its dynamism.

'In the course of time, the base of PP members has both broadened and increased.' (Sida 2000:139) 'There is a continuous flow between the three categories of membership, and the Network is consequently very dynamic.' (Sida 2000:141)

We have adapted this idea as Channels of Participation (see Figure 6).

4.4.4 Participation and information flows
Many networks produce a newsletter of one kind or another, which can also be used to assess the dynamism of the network.

Encouraging people to contribute and to 'own' the newsletter is a job of continuous monitoring and review. IANSA, faced with limited contributions to its newsletter and, in particular, gaps from certain parts of the world, decided to look again at the balance of regions, policy, practice and editorial appearing in the newsletter. It now seeks to

- Give space to contributions from a variety of sources
- Ensure a balance between northern and southern organisations
- Ensure a balance between policy issues, and programme activities of members
- Be self-sustaining, in that the secretariat does not have actively to seek out contributions.
- Keep central editorial to a minimum

In this way it is an expression of decentralisation, and democratic principles, and it values the dynamic *action* that members are taking in support of the aims of the network.

'immediately there were more contributions and it was less centrally written, people said there was a great improvement.' (Interview with IANSA Co-ordinator, 2001)

In similar vein, The Women's Global Network on Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) sees their newsletter as a key way of measuring the following aspects of participation:

- the success of their linking, – international, national and local, both out and across
- empowerment – in particular giving international meaning to local action and helping to strategize
- the office's capacity to give fair space allocation, to read and listen to feedback.

Other networks, such as Creative Exchange, are working to tailor their information flow to the expressed interests of the participants. This means that the way the flow occurs through the network is more nuanced, in the hope that this will prevent people being overloaded with information that they don't want. This presupposes the secretariat or co-ordinator understands what members can offer and what information they need, and that this is regularly updated. To that end, Creative Exchange is instituting an annual 'contributions assessment'.

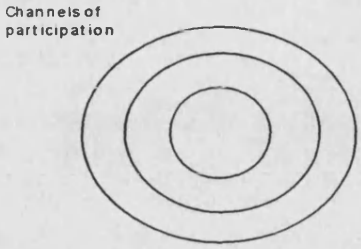
Figure 6

CHANNELS OF PARTICIPATION

This is a simple way of defining how many 'categories' of participation your network has, and being able to see how your members contribute.

The idea is not to 'categorise' the members, but ***understand how*** people participate and at what levels. People may move between levels.

It may help to keep it simple. Three categories is probably enough for monitoring purposes.



The outer ring indicates a more remote relationship with the network, while the inner one indicates a more active and involved relationship.
For instance, in the UK Conflict, Development and Peace Network (CODEP)

- *Outer ring* – this category of participation involves receipt of the newsletter, with an occasional contribution to the content of the newsletter
- *Middle ring* – this category of participation involves receipt of the newsletter, with occasional contribution; and participation in the annual conference at some level.
- *Inner ring* – this category of participation involves receipt of newsletter, participation in the annual conference, and participation in strategic activities, such as governance committee, policy work and/or lobbying.

In a second example, a lobbying network used the following numbered participation levels for its evaluation:

1. Inner-Circle, very regular shared communication and debate/discussion, input. Part of decision-making process. Trusted. Has regular dialogue with own government.
2. Regular communication/input, active with own government, trusted but not party to confidential information
3. Regular sharing of communication both ways. Active on appeals
4. Share information
5. Recipient of Information

They used a simple table to help them determine how much members participate, and what they contribute. They have also added in other factors, such as the level of access members have to key players. That way they can see where the gaps are in the network's coverage or reach.

Name	Country	Participation Level	Contribution	Other Factors eg Access

4.4.5 Monitoring activity at the edges

There is always the danger that the secretariat, in a bid to understand and manage the dynamics of participation, will miss what happens at the places in the network where it has little contact. This doesn't necessarily mean that nothing is happening. Various networks have developed simple ways to keep track of the kind of networking that is going on at the edges which has probably been stimulated or facilitated by the network.

IFRTD, for instance, has made "putting people in touch with one another" one of the core objectives that need to be monitored. Their newsletter deliberately keeps the items as short summaries so that members have to follow-up with the relevant contact to get further information. In this way the Secretariat stimulates linking that doesn't 'go through' the centre, and can be monitored as part of the network facilitation process. Participants can then be asked how being featured in the newsletter made a difference to them. Monitoring this activity adds another dimension to our understanding of how dynamic the network is. (see Figure 7)

Figure 7

MONITORING NETWORKING AT THE EDGES

One of the main aspects that networks wish to monitor is the level of networking that goes on that doesn't directly come through the secretariat or coordinator, but that nevertheless has been stimulated by the network structure and what it has to offer. Capturing a sense of the level of this 'activity' should give you some idea of how vibrant and alive the network is.

- A very simple way is to track what new contacts people make as a result of putting items in the newsletter. You can do this by sending a simple follow-up email after an issue, or by asking people to keep a note of contacts in return for getting space in the newsletter.

IFRTD only put short summaries about people's work in their newsletter, with a contact address, as a way of stimulating people to contact each other directly.

Creative Exchange: send out a short follow-up email asking how many contacts have been made as a result of the newsletter item

Codep keeps a record of how many new subscribers they get after every issue – this is an indicator that recipients are sending it on to others (networking)

ABColombia sends out a free electronic weekly news summary. To subscribe you need to give details of who you are and why you want to receive it. This helps to map types of recipients (experts, journalists, students etc).

- A network coordinator can keep a simple log of how often they put people in touch with others, either on the phone, or by email. This need not be done all the time, but could be sampled over a three month period. Bear in mind the ups and downs of the activity level in the network (many networks are more active prior to and during relevant UN meetings for example).

Looked at together, the amount of activity should give some an indication of the vibrancy and aliveness of the network.

Figure 8

MECHANISMS THAT HAVE HELPED ENSURE HIGH LEVELS OF MUTUAL TRUST

Meetings and Communication
Annual face-to-face meetings
- Open and frank discussions
- Willingness and ability to co-operate constructively and work hard and creatively together
- Frequent exchanges together with the interchange of ideas
- Good safety standards on email
- Meetings held under 'Chatham House' [off-the-record] rules

Membership and commitment
- Personal experience of the country by members and an understanding of the issues and problems
- Long-term commitment to the issues and the welfare of the people
- Very high moral standards, integrity and skill
- Meeting of equals
- Everyone has something different to offer
- Relatively small circle, with similarity of views and interests
- Clarity and limits about who can be a member, given the circumstances and the nature of the work

Consensus and autonomy
- Institutional limitations are respected and honoured
- No attempt to force cooperation
- No attempt to over-represent the level of consensus; each action initiated by the Secretariat leaves open the option to sign off or not; only those who have signed off on an action are actually listed

4.4.6 Relationships

As discussed in Section Three, relationships built on trust are the key ingredient necessary for a network to knit together. The sustainability and vitality of the network will depend to some degree on there being mechanisms in place to support these relationships.

In one evaluation undertaken as a result of this project, participants were asked to be explicit about levels of trust in the network and the sustaining mechanisms in place to foster trust. They are listed in the box. They are by no means exhaustive, and pertain to a small, contained, country-specific network where confidentiality is at a premium. They are included here (see Figure 8) to encourage examination of trust-building mechanisms and as a starting point for discussions about levels of trust in a network.

The other aspect of 'relationship' is the heightened importance of individuals in a network. While many participants will be representatives of institutions, the energy and drive given to the network will depend in large degree on the personality of the individual concerned.

Several networks highlighted the impact changes in leadership or governance had had on their network. In the experience of one country-specific lobbying network, a change in personnel in the co-ordination office had meant a change in the power dynamics. Those who'd had a privileged role in committees left and others joined. The direction of the network began to change. Active members became inactive and vice-versa.

On the other hand, dependency on a few key people was highlighted as a risk to sustainability. There is always a risk the network will lose strength if key people go or get burned out.

'The ratio of active/inactive members does raise a question mark over the sustainability .., since any change in the members of a core group of activists may threaten the continued existence of the network as a whole.' (Network X)

Networking done for this research has confirmed that few, if any networks pay sufficient attention to how to resolve conflicts between individuals (networks are full of strong personalities). This may well be a fruitful area for further research work.

4.4.7 Leadership and co-ordination

'There is tension between the co-ordination person /office taking on a leadership role, seeing the big picture, and giving people the space to be self-directing. How far does the co-ordinator lead and how much do they facilitate and help build capacity? The tension between the two is real and continuous, and in many ways is the nature of the job.' (Action Research Group 4 Notes 2001)

Probably the most important and dynamic part of the success of the networked 'organisation' is the relationship between leadership and co-ordination. This may well be best expressed as 'facilitative leadership'. Such leadership may be shared out around the network. It needs to include consensus-building, knowledge of context and the membership, making the right connections, and spotting the gaps, the opportunities and the actions that could be taken to move the agenda forward.

Sarason & Lorentz' have isolated four characteristics which nicely capture the movement, creativity and expertise needed by those leading and co-ordinating networks (summarised in Allen Nan 1999:6):

1. *Knowing the territory* - a broad and sophisticated understanding of the range of members, other actors in the field, the resources available, the needs, and the history
2. *Scanning, fluidity, imaginativeness* - this is about watching for openings, seeing the connections and possibilities that exist, taking advantage of the moment
3. *Perceiving assets and building on strengths* - the goal here is to work with the assets and existing resources of the network, and build on those strengths
4. *Power, influence, and selflessness* - for Saranson & Lorentz, co-ordinators work from a base-line value of being a resource to all in the network, committed to helping them to do their work better. Co-ordinators have no formal power but work from a base of personal influence

In our meetings we discussed the myriad ways in which *we* as co-ordinators act to stimulate greater participation:

1. Knowing the territory: being aware of how people think in the industry or sector; keeping an eye on where people are and how you might help them to move forward;
2. Recognising that people do not necessarily want to make connections outside their own regions or areas of expertise; knowledge of the context, the concepts and the way they interrelate

3. Making connections: spotting the gaps, making the connections between regions for participants, building and maintaining relationships with other networks
4. Catching the opportunities: Identifying international events that could bring people together, or a context that would provide a moment for joint activities (such as the International Year of...., or an upcoming thematic conference).
5. Being inventive: providing something fresh and interesting
6. Being clear and transparent: clarity of aims or objectives helps people to see where they fit in; letting people know what they get out of it, so that they can see the benefit.
7. Assisting members in their own environments: helping members to ensure that they have institutional support for their participation, supporting them in internal lobbying in their own organisations
8. Keeping people engaged: making each participant at some time feel they have your attention and that you know who they are; knowing the usual players and finding ways to include those who are often excluded; encouraging, listening to needs and desires
9. Delivering on expectations: making sure activities proposed are feasible, and achievable
10. Mediating and building consensus: helping to bring all perspectives into the frame, so that all can see that their contribution is meaningful in the overall context

The *Checklist for Networks* (see Figure 9) is a guide to the overall process aspects of network building, and includes the kinds of evaluative questions networks could begin to ask of themselves on leadership and trust. As Reinicke *et al* point out,

'The intangible outcome of networks – such as greater trust between participants and the creation of a forum for raising and discussing other new issues – are often as important as the tangible ones and they may endure even longer.' (Reinicke et al 2000:xv)

4.4.8 Participatory story-building - analysing change

Understanding participation through the work many networks do on lobbying and influencing is probably one of the biggest challenges. What do we want to be able to explain through evaluation in this context? How can we monitor what we do, when defining change in this arena is complicated enough in a standard project environment? Networks necessarily work in many complex contexts and spaces at the same time. Identifying causality is an impossible task. As the quotes suggest, the best we can hope for are reasonable approximations about the effect of what we do.

'Were our interventions timely or influential among circles of influence: I'm not sure we shall ever know this. Diplomats don't often share when they think they have heard a good idea or received a 'usable' intervention. The only test is if you see them doing something which looks like what we suggested.' (Member of Network S)

'One need know little about research to appreciate the elusiveness of definitive, pound-your-fist-on-the-table conclusions about causality. Our aim is more modest: reasonable estimations of the likelihood that particular activities have contributed in concrete ways to observed effects – emphasis on the word ***reasonable*** *[emphasis in original]. Not definitive conclusions. Not absolute proof. Evaluation offers reasonable estimations of probabilities and likelihood, enough to provide useful guidance in an uncertain world (Blalock quoted in Patton 1997:217)*

At the same time, attempts to disaggregate the 'impact' of the work of the individual members, and that of the network in a lobbying/advocacy environment misses the point. The important issue is to determine how far a network helps to foster co-ordinated, reciprocal action, action that can be replicated in a number of countries simultaneously. How it can be a repository for the combined analytical intelligence of its members, and stimulate better, more creative and debated responses in the very challenging work of human rights protection, peace-building and development.

The initial premise of this research was to begin to find ways to build the practice of evaluation into the normal routine of network working. In seeking to illuminate the lobbying aspect of our work, this very routine, regular evaluation is almost certainly the only way we are going to be able to be able to trace the changes we initiate through what is dynamic, organic and linked work.

Jordan and Van Tuijl did a typology of linked campaigning work in 1998. While many lobbying networks would probably not see themselves as campaigning organisations, these criteria are none-the-less helpful for illuminating the processes at work in any networked lobbying and advocacy project.

- Extent to which objectives of those involved are linked
- Fluidity of information exchange
- Level of collaboration in review and setting strategies and levels of risk
- Accountability to most vulnerable actors

These criteria help to make explicit certain factors that indicate that lobbying work is 'networked and linked'.

- **Shared** objectives, **collaboration** in setting and reviewing the strategies being used to advance those objectives, and **joint** evaluation of that work. These indicate that the work is networked
- **Responsible relationships** between those in the network and those Jordan and Tuijl describe as most vulnerable. These might be peace activists, the rural poor, those monitoring arms flows in unstable countries. This indicates that the value base underpinning the work is happening in practice
- **Flows** of **relevant** and **useful information** and **analysis** between those who need it to do the work.

We would add these further criteria:

- Respect for autonomy of mandate and action. As mentioned in the above section on relationships and trust, the freedom to act autonomously but in concert with shared objectives is essential if the networked nature of the work is to survive. In many ways this comes down to the skill of the co-ordination and leadership. Part of this skill is to know the mandates and limitations of the participants well enough to be able to provide information and analysis, texts and ideas, to enable them to work together without compromising their autonomy.
- Mechanisms to facilitate trust-building

The participatory story building idea (see Figure 10) helps to illuminate our linked work and our capacity to influence change in more detail.

It is intended to reveal:
- How far our strategies and understanding of the context is shared,
- How far the information, ideas, documents and analyses circulating in the network have helped us in the critical moments
- How far our individual mandates have allowed us to work creatively
- How connected we are to other actors in the chain.

It therefore deepens our shared understanding for future work. In this way, the exercise in itself is intended to build trust and linkages.

4.5 Progress

During the course of the research we have sought to use the Contributions Assessment, the Channels of Participation and the Participatory Story-Building ideas to help us to 'see' and 'explain' networked working differently. The move toward assessment of contributions has been embraced as a simple but novel way of understanding what the essence of a network is, and some, like Creative Exchange, are intending to build it in to their annual procedures. It is hoped that the data will provide a solid base for assessing how far the network is able to circulate and exchange those resources. The focus on contributions is also generating some resistance. Some network co-ordinators are concerned that members will feel coerced or pushed into making further contributions above and beyond their current work load. Others are concerned that if they cannot demonstrate they are meeting a need their importance or existence, or funding will be threatened.

The Channels of Participation idea, is also simple and has been used with the IWG on Sri Lanka to document the interaction of the members of the network, and the reach the network has. The IWG regularly does this kind of mapping exercise, although it has not used it up to now as an evaluation tool.

The Participatory Story-Building has been more complicated to trial, and has, in the context of the ABColombia Group, been used by the co-ordinator as a tool for analysis with key actors in the international networks working on Colombia. Discussions have been held about key moments of change, key actors and strategies, but largely mediated through the co-ordinator and documented by her. A joint evaluative meeting has yet to be held.

In all cases, the tools we have developed are intended to be simple enough to be generically useful, but able to reveal quite complex dynamics. They are designed to be used as part of a network's routine practice. They all need further refinement and that can only be done through working with them, trying them out, and changing them to fit the specific characteristics of the network.

Figure 9

CHECKLIST FOR NETWORKS

The idea of this set of criteria is to provide a broad checklist of characteristics that networks tend to share and some potential questions you might like to ask when thinking about doing monitoring and evaluation. Some will apply to the capacity-building functions of a network, others to a lobbying function. Many networks have combined goals. Similarly some will be more relevant to a tightly-focused limited task network, in which membership might be limited to those with relevant contacts and skills, and others to looser and more open-ended exchange networks.

This list is the result of extensive reading done for this project, and is intended as guidance only. To be useful in understanding the ***process*** aspects of working in a networked way. ***How*** you decide on what work to do, who does it and ***how*** you do the work together. And, of course, what questions you need to ask about its value.

1. What is a network?
'Networks are energising and depend crucially on the motivation of members'
(Networks for Development, 2000:35)

This definition is one that is broadly shared across the literature, although it is more detailed than some.
A network has:
- **A common purpose** derived from shared perceived need for **action**
- **Clear objectives** and **focus**
- **A non-hierarchical** structure

A network encourages
- **Voluntary participation** and **commitment**
- **The input** of resources by members for benefit of all

A network provides
- **Benefit** derived from participation and linking

2. What does a network do?
- Facilitate shared space for exchange, learning, development – the capacity-building aspect
- Act for change in areas where none of members is working in systematic way – the advocacy, lobbying and campaigning aspect
- Include a range of stakeholders – the diversity/ broad-reach aspect

3. What are the guiding principles and values?
- Collaborative action
- Respect for diversity
- Enabling marginalised voices to be heard
- Acknowledgement of power differences, and commitment to equality

4. How do we do what we do, in accordance with our principles and values?
Building Participation
- Knowing the membership, what each can put in, and what each seeks to gain
- Valuing what people can put in
- Making it possible for them to do so
- Seeking commitment to a minimum contribution
- Ensuring membership is appropriate to the purpose and tasks
- Encouraging members to be realistic about what they can give
- Ensuring access to decision-making and opportunities to reflect on achievements
- Keeping internal structural and governance requirements to a necessary minimum.

Building Relationships and Trust
- Spending time on members getting to know each other, especially face-to-face
- Coordination point/secretariat has relationship-building as vital part of work
- Members/secretariat build relations with others outside network - strategic individuals and institutions

Facilitative Leadership (may be one person, or rotating, or a team)
- Emphasis on quality of input rather than control
- Knowledgeable about issues, context and opportunities,
- Enabling members to contribute and participate
- Defining a vision and articulating aims
- Balancing the creation of forward momentum and action, with generating consensus
- Understanding the dynamics of conflict and how to transform relations
- Promoting regular monitoring and participatory evaluation

Figure 9 Cont:../

Figure 9 Continued.

Fostering diversity and dynamism
'too loose a structure ..drains potential and continuity, and too heavy a structure .. stifles initiative and innovation'. (Networks for Development, 2000:28)

- Have the minimum structure and rules necessary to do the work. Ensure governance is light, not strangling. Give members space to be dynamic.
- Encourage all those who can make a contribution to the overall goal to do so, even if it is small.

Working toward decentralised and democratic governance

- At the centre, make only the decisions that are vital to continued functioning. Push decision-making outwards.
- Ensure that those with least resources and power have the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way.

Building Capacity

- Encourage all to share the expertise they have to offer. Seek out additional expertise that is missing.

5. What are the evaluation questions that we can ask about these generic qualities? How do each contribute to the achievement of your aims and objectives?

Participation

- What are the differing levels or layers of participation across the network?
- Are people participating as much as they are able to and would like?
- Is the membership still appropriate to the work of the network? Purpose and membership may have evolved over time
- Are opportunities provided for participation in decision-making and reflection?
- What are the obstacles to participation that the network can do something about?

Trust

- What is the level of trust between members? Between members and secretariat?
- What is the level of trust between non-governing and governing members?
- How do members perceive levels of trust to have changed over time?
- How does this differ in relation to different issues?
- What mechanisms are in place to enable trust to flourish? How might these be strengthened?

Leadership

- Where is leadership located?
- Is there a good balance between consensus-building and action?
- Is there sufficient knowledge and analytical skill for the task?
- What kind of mechanism is in place to facilitate the resolution of conflicts?

Structure and control

- How is the structure felt and experienced? Too loose, too tight, facilitating, strangling?
- Is the structure appropriate for the work of the network?
- How much decision-making goes on?
- Where are most decisions taken? Locally, centrally, not taken?
- How easy is it for change in the structure to take place?

Diversity and dynamism

- How easy is it for members to contribute their ideas and follow-through on them?
- If you map the scope of the network through the membership, how far does it reach? Is this as broad as intended? Is it too broad for the work you are trying to do?

Democracy

- What are the power relationships within the network? How do the powerful and less powerful interrelate? Who sets the objectives, has access to the resources, participates in the governance?

Factors to bear in mind when assessing sustainability

- Change in key actors, internally or externally; succession planning is vital for those in central roles
- Achievement of lobbying targets or significant change in context leading to natural decline in energy;
- Burn out and declining sense of added value of network over and above every-day work.
- Membership in networks tends to be fluid. A small core group can be a worry if it does not change and renew itself over time, but snapshots of moments in a network's life can be misleading. In a flexible, responsive environment members will fade in and out depending on the 'fit' with their own priorities. Such changes may indicate dynamism rather than lack of focus.
- Decision-making and participation will be affected by the priorities and decision-making processes of members' own organisations.
- Over-reaching, or generating unrealistic expectations may drive people away
- Asking same core people to do more may diminish reach, reduce diversity and encourage burn-out

Figure 10

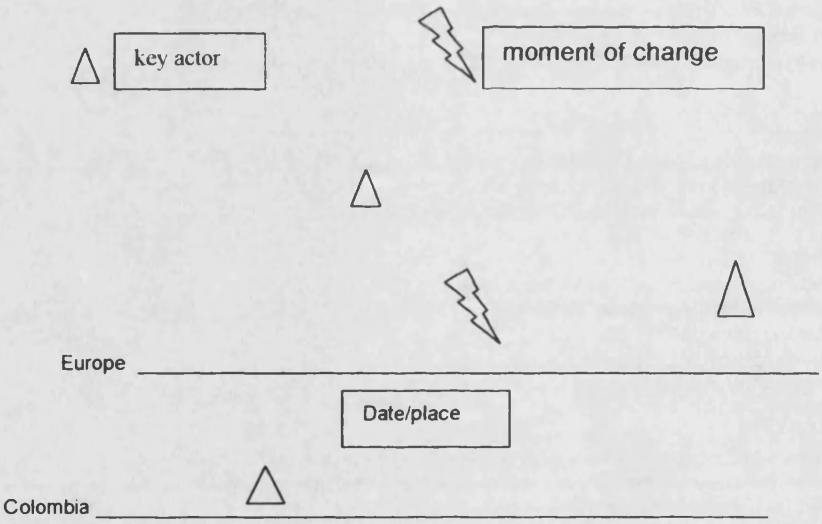
PARTICIPATORY STORY-BUILDING

This is a process to use with network members who together are doing lobbying and advocacy work. Each member will have different levels of access to decision and policy makers at one end of the chain, and to local partners and constituents at the other. Such strategic entry points are pooled to ensure the greatest coverage. Joint strategising, thinking and acting across space and time is what makes it 'networked' work.

However, each participant will have a different story to tell about the work they have done, the moments of change they have perceived and the obstacles they have faced. This exercise seeks to bring these stories together into one, without losing the richness, and then examine it. By looking critically, together, at who or where the main points of influence are, and what the key moments of change have been, the network as a whole learns about the scope of its work, the reach and access it has, and the strategies that have been influential. This can help in the next round of strategising. Telling the combined story is intended to reveal how we work, and help us to do it more effectively.

ABColombia Group has started to use this approach to identify the 'story of change' about networked lobbying and advocacy on Plan Colombia. Those most centrally involved have been asked to identify the key moments of change, key actors, and key strategies used to move the work forward. This includes several networks in Colombia, national and Europe-wide networks, and grass-roots and policy networks in USA. A broad picture is gradually being revealed against a timeline, a picture of the *who*, *how*, *where*, and *when*. It has also revealed how far that work was coordinated, who the key players in the networks are, and what the interlocking networks did to facilitate the timely provision and use of key documents.

We have been plotting this against parallel time-lines, as a way of linking action in each region to action in another. Strategies can be identified in discussion.



The skill is in selecting the strategically important events in order to construct a story that is meaningful with regard to real change. Like any mapping exercise, you can easily fill the paper with narrative activities. What is important is being able to detect significant shifts and reveal their meaning.

The suggestion is that this exercise be undertaken with as many of the network participants who are doing the work, in the same room at the same time. In this way, you can capture the richness of networked working and better understand the relationship between one activity and another.

SECTION 5

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IDEAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

5.1 Building evaluation into the routine of networks

The initial premise of this research was to begin to find ways to build the practice of evaluation into the normal routine of network working. Given the variety of participants and often far-flung nature of networks, evaluation needs to be conceived as an exercise built into the daily functioning. In seeking to illuminate the lobbying aspect of our work, routine, regular and shared evaluation is almost certainly the only way we are going to be able to be able to trace the changes we initiate through what is dynamic, organic and linked work.

'Populations shift, goals shift, knowledge about program practices and their values change, and external forces are highly unstable. By internalizing and institutionalizing self-evaluation processes and practices, a dynamic and responsive approach to evaluation can be developed to accommodate these shifts.' (Fetterman 2001:3)

Most networks evaluate constantly. This evaluation not only changes the process of acting, but also alters the outcome next time. As such they are dynamic and evolving entities. However, they rarely 'write down' such evaluation for external consumption, or make the 'evaluative' aspect of their work explicit. People want to know that their time is spent effectively. This means that time and energy must be set aside for joint reflection, analysis and evaluation, otherwise the important benefits cannot be achieved

To build evaluation into the practice of networks, in such a way that it can be used to 'account' for the resources invested by both participants and funders, we need to do several things:

- Make sure that evaluation of our work is on the agenda at network meetings, and doesn't get pushed aside in the dynamic drive to 'act'.
- Value and understand the unique nature of what a network does. Its linking, co-ordinating and facilitating function are process activities. This work needs to be recognised as an explicit outcome of a network operating effectively. Good process indicators and evaluation are a priority.
- Use interactive, dialogic methods to understand the change we are effecting. This demands time and creativity. We need to be able to trace our joint working through joint evaluation practice. That way we accumulate learning and skill about how to be more effective in the future
- Engage the services of evaluation specialists not at the 'endpoint' or 'crisis' point, but as accompaniers to the process of network development. Such 'organisational accompaniment' will help to document and reveal how networks work, where their strengths lie and what can help them evolve.
- Secretariats need the assistance of members in monitoring the work of a network. One way members or participants can 'contribute' to the work of the network is by offering to do small quantities of monitoring and evaluation work in collaboration with the secretariat. For instance, other networks use 'participant-observer' methods at international meetings, which can be generalised to ensure that all network members 'report back' on their linked work.

5.2 Cost-Benefit

Networks fundamentally fulfil a process role. The maximum benefit at minimum cost comes when the members work separately but together, pursuing institutional objectives which are affected by the joint strategic thinking of the network, and can put to the service of the network's shared understanding and analysis. The members do the work, using the capacity of the co-ordinator/ facilitator to foster creative thinking, share ideas, support one another's lead activities when they can.

Thus the real financial resource requirements of a network are what's needed to enable the facilitation and relationship building function to happen. This includes the essential aspects of face-to-face network meetings, appropriate communication technology, and space for exchange, dialogue, resource-sharing and evaluation. Networks take time to consolidate, and get established. Long-term commitment by co-ordinators is essential if institutional memory is to be retained and relationships nurtured. Time needs to be dedicated to establish trust, in order to build the relationships that allow powerful networks to flourish. Good communication and interpersonal relationships are important but not enough. Networks and their secretariats or co-ordinators must

enhance their competence in network processes in order to find, join and participate fully in the activities of the network.

This process activity should be complemented by funds which allow for flexible emergency response, and for renewing and rethinking the direction the network is taking faced with complex and rapidly changing contexts.

Costs starts to rise when the 'secretariat' or institutionalised function becomes synonymous with the network, and the secretariat begins to become more and more 'operational', doing more of the work itself. This is where traditional core costs start to take on greater prominence, more staff and equipment are needed. There are networks which are minimally institutionalised, to allow for maximum commitment and participation by members at minimum cost. This works well, and it needs long-term basic core funding.

What creates internal tension, confusion and misunderstanding about 'who or what is the network' is the 'project thinking' that we are all so used to. Unfortunately, in a general climate of core funds being reduced, and process activities disguised amongst activities budgets, the network has a real dilemma.

5.3 Ideas for further exploration

5.3.1 Networked working

This research has deepened our understanding of the complexity involved in networked working. Few who co-ordinate or participate in networks have time to dedicate to reflection, yet if we are to improve our practice, and thus make more of a difference through our work, further research of this kind is necessary. Those working as network co-ordinators have an enormous understanding and breadth of knowledge about how networks grow, develop, evolve and function that could be made more explicit and available to others doing the same work. This can be done in a networked way, provided sufficient time and resources are allocated.

5.3.2 Relationships and conflict

Following on from Taylor (2000) and Chambers (1997), we need a more sophisticated '"relationship" vocabulary', to understand and dialogue about how we are in relationship with others. In particular we need deeper understanding of how respectful relationships are built and maintained across cultures.

Networking done for this research has confirmed that most networks experience conflicts between participating individuals, yet few, if any have mechanisms in place to help them to resolve them. Networks, like other organisations in the field, are full of strong personalities. Perceptions and approaches to participation and decision-making may differ across cultures. This may well be a fruitful area for further research work.

5.3.3 Power relations

We have not had time to devote to examining in any depth how power relations work in a network, above and beyond discussions about the importance of trust and relationship-building. If one objective of networks is to provide a meeting point for large institutions, often financially powerful and smaller, poorer representative groups from the majority world, then issues about how power relations work are paramount.

5.3.4 Evaluation

The evaluation tools we have thought through and developed in this pilot project would benefit from being tried and refined in a wider context, with a broader group of networks. This project certainly opened up space for new ideas and thinking which show promise in the search for more appropriate methodologies.

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[i] All quotations from evaluations of networks have been anonynised to preserve confidentiality

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APPENDIX II

The Power of Participation - capturing the impact of international networks.

PAPER FOR UKES CONFERENCE BELFAST 2001.

CHURCH, M. & BITEL, M.

The power of participation - capturing the impact of international networks.

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Abstract

This paper reports on work in progress from a DfID-funded action research project on evaluation and networks in the international development and human rights field. It explores the following questions about networks:

- What is a network? How can we conceptualise networks to help us work out how to monitor and evaluate what we do within and through them?
- How does a network differ from other organisational structures?
- Why do traditional approaches to outcome evaluation fail to capture the impact of networks?
- What are the key aspects we wish to monitor and evaluate? How might we do that?
- How can we build evaluation into our work?

This paper reports on progress to date. This includes the development of evaluation approaches that take the issues of power, participation and process into account. The work is the result of the ***experience*** of those who coordinate networks, and our attempts to put evaluation into ***practice***. It will offer suggestions for new tools for the evaluator's toolbox, and our experience to date in piloting those tools.

Acknowledgements

This paper is the result of a process of reflection, discussion and practice with Kathleen Armstrong (CODEP), Priyanthi Fernando (IFRTD), Sally Joss (IANSA) Manisha Marwaha-Diedrich (FEWER), Helen Gould & Ana Laura de la Torre (Creative Exchange), who all work for international networks. Thanks are also due to Claudy Vouhé at the DPU who managed the project.

Introduction

It is currently the vogue to refer to the evaluators' toolkit. This makes the assumption that there are a variety of methods (tools), albeit limited, which can be applied to the many different situations that require evaluating. As evaluators we are often more at home with some tools than others (our preferred methodologies). We apply our knowledge of how these tools should be used in any given situation (our evaluation design). Sometimes we become involved in an evaluation where our tools don't quite fit. These situations present methodological challenges. Our assumptions are questioned. These are usually the points at which we grow.

This paper documents one such challenge. This action research project on capturing the impact of international networks was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID) to explore new and more meaningful ways to evaluate international networks. It is generally held that international networks (often linking the north and the south) are a good thing. But on what evidence? Previous attempts to evaluate such networks concluded that there was a need to develop new methodologies which fit more appropriately than traditional project monitoring and evaluation. Many networks conduct lobbying and advocacy work, and the methodology for understanding the changes brought about by such work is very under-developed.[1] In this research we have concentrated on networks that do more than share information.

What is a network?

'The Atom is the past. The symbol of science for the next century is the dynamical Net. ...Whereas the Atom represents clean simplicity, the Net channels the *messy power of complexity*. The only organization capable of non-prejudiced growth or unguided learning is a network. All other topologies limit what can happen... Indeed the network is the least structured organization that can be said to have any structure at all. *In fact a plurality of truly divergent components can only remain coherent in a network. No other arrangement – chain, pyramid, tree, circle, hub –*

[1] J. Chapman & A Wameyo *Monitoring and evaluating advocacy: a scoping study.* London: ActionAid, January 2001; Karl, Marilee: *Measuring the Immeasurable.* New Delhi 1999

can contain true diversity working as a whole.' (Kevin Kelly quoted in footnote, Castells[2], emphasis added).

Most authors agree, at least implicitly, that a network can be called a network when the relationship between those in the network is voluntarily entered into, the autonomy of participants remains intact, and there are mutual or joint activities (see Starkey 1997; Karl 1999; Networks for Development 2000). These are markers about relationship, about power and about action. In this action research group we found we had to explore our understanding of what networks are, how they actually function, in order to begin to understand how we might monitor and evaluate what we do.

How can we conceptualise networks to help us work out how to monitor and evaluate what we do within and through them?

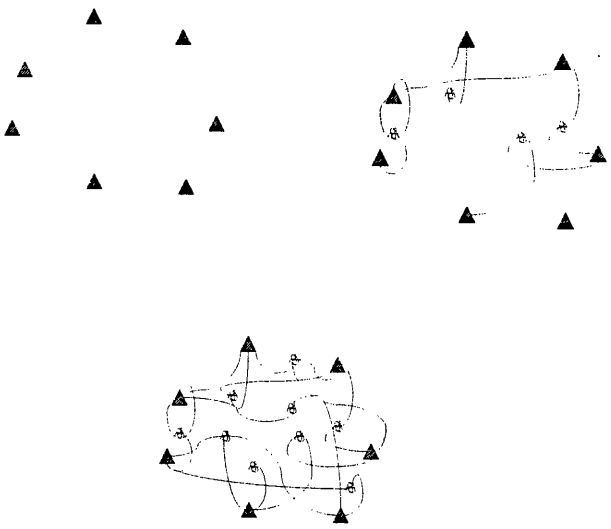
A network gets its life and vitality from the input of members. Networks tend to grow out of conversations, at conferences, where people connect through common agendas and think that they can offer one another and the wider world something better together than separately.

Trust is the interconnective tissue that holds the network in place. These are relationships voluntarily entered into, over and above our 'institutional' responsibilities. Trust is essential to maintain the energy necessary for joint action. This is especially true when, as in our case, the action is in contentious and conflictive issues, around human rights, power, small arms, development, war. The relationships are in large measure what sustains the network. When these relationships come under strain, if work is not done explicitly to support them, then conflicts over control and representation may become draining and undermining.

Joint action, where it is central, gives the network strength. It is often in undertaking activities together that the linking relationships which make the net are built.

Many have conceived of networks as a series of points linked in some way. Through a central hub, in two way flows of informational exchange, in multi-way flows. Yet for those of us who work as network coordinators, a network is based on the relational. The common purpose is what makes it a network, not simply networking. And then we are *doing, we are undertaking and engaging in an effort to realise that goal.* It is the joint activity that gives us edge and power. *It is the relational, engaged in the creational, that makes the structure.*

Threads, knots and nets. This concept seeks to give the network a living feel, and one dependent on the commitment and input of its participants. It hopes to capture the sense of a dynamic, responsive, emerging form, the messy power of complexity, diversity, autonomy in the whole.



- the threads give the network its life. The threads link the participants through communication, friendship, shared ideas, conflict, information.
- the knots are where the threads the participants spin meet and join together. They are the joint activities aimed at realising the common purpose. These knots of activity make the most of members contributions, commitment and skills. They provide benefit and energy and inspiration.
- the threads are given tensile strength by the knots that tie them together, and those common activities lead to greater trust, community, relationship.
- the net is the structure constructed through the relationships and the joint activities. This structure allows for autonomy in community. It provides solidarity without losing identity, and is dynamic enough to incorporate new participants and expand without losing its common purpose. The structure is light, not strangling.
- the coordination of such a structure can be imagined as a job of inspiration, and of maintenance and repair. Of seeing the 'true

[2] Castells, Manuel (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society* Blackwell p61

diversity' and helping it to 'work as a whole'. Watching out for broken threads, knotting together appropriate activities, putting out new threads to new participants. Working the net. Net workers.

Why traditional approaches to outcome evaluation fail to capture the impact of networks

Structure, participation, relationship and action interrelate in a network. We need methods and approaches that recognise that the vital input from members, the joint action, the relationship-building, the consensus-building and the facilitation are integrated, and inter-related. Simply reading documents and interviewing key people will not do. We need to understand how a dynamic and evolving form influences its environment and is itself influenced by many contexts. We must move away from simple cause and effect, and attribution. We must build in participative reflective processes if we are to capture the diversity and breadth of our work.

Contribution and input

One important contribution that we have to make to the debate is our understanding of how participation sustains our networks. These ideas started from a moment of inspiration, which like many such ideas, is very simple. Our discussions about participation come from the perspective of network coordinators. We know that the network works poorly if there is low-level participation. We generated lots of questions: about the added value of a network, net benefit to members, meeting needs of members.

Most of us are accustomed to the needs assessment approach. This enables us to secure funding, because we can demonstrate we are meeting needs. But it seemed to be fundamentally at odds with the nature of the network project. For instance, who is the network if not its members? If the members start to see the coordination point or secretariat as the network, then the secretariat starts to have to do all the work, and meet the needs of members. It is at this point that the tensions start to appear. The secretariat and the network get conflated. One becomes the other. The secretariat does more work, and the participants in the network expect more and maybe do less. The energy starts to change, and responsibility is relocated. As the secretariat or coordination is often the place where the funds are located, that is where the accountability resides to funders. It is also where power, real or imagined, starts to get concentrated.

So we upended the idea of 'meeting needs' and decided instead to work from the starting point of 'contribution' and 'input'. After all, the input from participants is the base line resource, which it is then possible to circulate, share, exchange, and join-up with.

Contributions Assessment

We developed the idea of a *Contributions Assessment.*

- a contributions assessment is the flip-side of a needs assessment. The aim is to hook into where the energy lies for the members, and involve people through their passion and drive to make a difference
- it maps what members believe they can contribute to a network project.: human resources, activities, skills, and energy. Value is placed on the interest and willingness to contribute, on what you can give not the size or extent of what you can contribute. In this way it pays attention to power differences, and obstacles to commitment
- it enables the network as a whole to see what resources it can draw on and where it might need to seek extra members or resources
- it enables members to be realistic about what they can commit to
- it provides a different kind of baseline assessment against which to evaluate.

We are currently working on how we can insert this idea into our daily practice of planning, working, reflecting and evaluating. We want to see what kind of impact such thinking may have on people's interest and willingness to participate. This is not simply a tool. It is more profound than that. It comes from a belief that we all gain not simply by having our needs met, but by offering to others what most inspires and interests us, by participating.

We have two early experiences of using the approach. For Codep, a platform for exchange and learning about conflict, development and peace, the network is farflung and mainly sustained through a newsletter, round-tables and an annual conference. The Committee wanted to undertake a needs assessment to see how better to respond to members. We piloted a workshop to see if we could better understand what members could offer and could commit to. The current

series of round tables makes use of those inputs. And one way Codep will be able to assess its achievements will be to see if those who offered to 'put in' got the chance they needed.

Creative Exchange, the forum for cultural rights and development, wanted to see what its members wanted. It designed a questionnaire that put emphasis on what members could contribute. The response rate was much higher than expected, and the information about what resources were 'out there' was vastly increased.

Participatory Case Studies

Many networks grow out of a joint desire to change something. To get women's rights onto the agenda, to mobilise against the destructive power of light weapons proliferation, to relieve the debt burden of the developing world by pushing the powerful into action which will benefit the poor. The strength of a network approach to such lobbying tasks is the potential breadth of approaches and access made possible by a varied membership, the capacity for simultaneous and geographically-widespread action. Any evaluative process has to capture this richness, diversity and commonality, and be humble in the face of its limitations. Donors want to know about 'impact', often linked to a log-frame approach tied into funding for a secretariat. Yet the work depends on the members, and the members are often independent organisations with their own organisational priorities, which shift and evolve.

The approach we are working with seeks to draw out how a piece of lobbying work develops. The idea is to identify key moments of change, key actors, key strategies and key relationships using a time-line. In a network, this has to be contextualised across various countries if not continents, and often in relationships with other networks.

An example: The ABColombia Group is a small network of six large British and Irish development agencies and two observer groups. The paid coordinator participates in a broader Europe-wide network which covers Germany, Sweden, France, Belgium, Spain, Greece, amongst others. Many of these countries have similar national networks. The coordinator works closely with three networks of Colombian organisations, and two US networks. The work is a collaborative, and always changing enterprise, taking account of changes in context, policy and key personnel. The greatest strengths are the quality of analysis, the variety of relationships and the flexibility of action. The greatest challenge is maintaining trust.

Recent work has included lobbying against US and European Union support for 'Plan Colombia'. This involved high level meetings across the US and Europe, published analyses, public protest in Colombia and the US, mass lobbying of elected representatives, confidential briefings, questions to ministers in elected chambers, negative press coverage, speaking at conferences, and much more besides. We all of us who have been directly or peripherally involved have a story to tell about the influence our contribution had on decision-makers. We all know implicitly the theories of strategic change we work with and that underpin our choice of action. What we rarely do is articulate them and put them all together. The list of key points of change, actors, strategies and relationships will vary according to context, timing and knowledge that is not necessarily shared. It is this story-building that we are proposing as a way of understanding the complexity of lobbying networks and their work.

Reflections and conclusions

It is too early to determine the adequacy and usefulness of the contributions assessments and the participatory case studies in improving the methodology to evaluate international networks. But one of the main outcomes of this work is that it is stimulating interest and discussion within the domain of international and domestic networks in the issues of power, relationships and participation.

In one current three-year project within the UK we are using the idea of the contributions assessment as part of an evaluation process for umbrella membership organisations, such as Bassac. This work has been funded by the Active Communities Unit of the UK Home Office. Lessons learned from the action research project have fundamentally altered the focus of the evaluation to explicitly include ways to measure participation, information exchange and the centrality of relationships.

Glossary

ABColombia:	British and Irish Agencies working in Colombia
Bassac:	British Association of Social Settlements & Action Centres
CODEP:	Conflict, Development and Peace Network
FEWER:	Forum on Early Warning and Early Response
IANSA:	International Action Network on Small Arms
IFRTD:	International Forum on Rural Transport and Development

APPENDIX III

Toward a Conceptual Framework for Evaluating International Social Change Networks.

NUNEZ, M. & WILSON-GRAU, R. (2003)

Towards a conceptual framework for evaluating international social change networks[1]

By Martha Nuñez[2] and Ricardo Wilson-Grau[3]

Introduction

During the 1990s, networks became an alternative form of social synergy because of their unique political and organisational potential. Through networks, diverse social actors pursue a common purpose based on personal and institutional relations. "Social change" networks aim to influence economic, political and cultural conditions in one or more societies. In these networks, the members are autonomous organisations—usually NGOs or community based organisations—and sometimes individuals. Furthermore, when the network is international, its aims and activities reflect heterogeneous contexts represented by its members.

Thus, an international social change network strives to link local efforts with global processes and build a movement that modifies power relations by:

- Fortifying creativity and critical thinking through dialogue and exchange.
- Sharing strategies and deepening understanding between diverse actors in complex situations.
- Addressing global problems through knowledge of their local, national and regional contexts.
- Strengthening a union of local forces in a global process.
- Creating and reinforcing international consciousness, commitment and solidarity.

For these reasons, we believe that international networks represent today one of the best means to achieve social change in a globalised world.

With these notes, we intend to contribute to the discussion on evaluating this type of Network.[4] Conceptually, our reflections are based on the excellent if limited literature that we have been able to find (see References). Our most recent practical experience was the evaluation we did of the Oilwatch Network at the end of 2002, commissioned by HIVOS, one of their donor counterparts.

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[4] From here on we use the term "Network" to refer specifically to an international social change network.

Understanding the political and operational complexity

A Network is an eminently political act. Its fundamental function is to configure the power and action of its members into a collective force for social change. Typically, the purpose of a Network is expressed in terms of modifying positions and relations of power; for example: protect and promote human and collective rights, conserve the environment or fortify equitable gender relations. Thus, the intended impact of a Network is expressed in its political purpose, rather than in institutional objectives. Said another way, Networks generally struggle for more or less intangible, even ideological, goals that have to do with the consciousness, behaviour, and empowerment of people and of societies. This does not mean, however, that the management bodies of a Network—general assembly, board of directors, secretariat—as well as each member, cannot set concrete and measurable operational objectives.

Nevertheless, the management of a Network is also complex and unusual. Networks operate through facilitation and co-operation around the activities of its organisational components instead of by directing programmes and executing projects. The principal actors—the members—are autonomous organisations and not the employees or even the managers, as is the case in other types of organisations. The structure of a network is not hierarchical; commonly, the co-ordinating body or secretariat assumes responsibilities for communication, co-ordination and organisation to catalyse and carry-out activities. This is to say that in a Network the scope of authority is restricted, and there do not exist procedures for command and control common to NGOs, grassroots organisations, governments and many other forms of organisation. Consequently, a Network requires different processes for planning, monitoring and evaluation.

In the light of this reality, we believe that the evaluation of a Network is a special challenge, both for those to be evaluated and for the evaluators. We understand it is:

- A means for learning about success and failure, more than as a mechanism of control.
- An aid for planning, to measure progress and propose solutions to problems.
- A transparent mechanism for accountability, based on indicators of effectiveness and efficiency, within the complexity of its operations.
- An instrument for preserving the historical memory of the common processes that originated and sustain the Network.
- A tool to register achievements and impacts, accepting that rarely will these be directly related to the activities of the Network, frequently the results will be collateral and unintentional, and almost always they will be the result of a broad effort with other social actors.

For these reasons, we consider that the evaluation of a Network should focus on two fundamental aspects: performance and results.

Understanding performance

For the functioning of a Network, we take into account four performance criteria crossed by three operational dimensions. The **four performance criteria**[5] are:

Democracy

In addition to being a recognised value, democratic management is a necessity in a Network. Success depends on equity in the relations and exercise of power within the Network. The members are autonomous organisations and the best guarantee that a decision will be implemented in a Network is for the executors to participate in making it. Thus, the members must participate in decision-making as well as in decision-implementing.

Diversity

The strength of a network resides above all in the diversity of its membership. It draws on the distinct social, economic, political and cultural contexts represented by its members. Part of the genius of a Network is that its members have different conceptions and utilise a variety of strategies to achieve change, while at the same time sharing common values and a collective purpose. The challenge of Network is to enable each one of these actors to make a creative and constructive contribution.

Dynamism

The Network promotes and maintains dynamism to the extent it is able to balance the diverse contributions of members with joint, sustained collaboration. For this, the leadership must stimulate and strengthen democratic internal processes, the active participation of all members and working effectively in alliances. A Network must enhance the interaction between its members. It facilitates innovative proposals for action.

Excellence – The relationships between organisations and individuals engaged in purposeful action characterises a Network. The quality of the interaction is a result of the quality of organisational performance. In fact, the effectiveness and efficiency of the operations of a Network is often the best guarantee of political impact.
These four criteria run through **three operational dimensions** that we analyse in relation to the six principal components of a Network's functioning.

Political purpose and the strategies

This is the Network's capacity to nurture consensus amongst its membership for its political reason for being and for the avenues to fulfilling that purpose. The political purpose answers the questions: What social change does the Network aim to achieve? What values motivate its members? For other types of organisations, the answers would be found in their "mission statement" o "institutional objectives".

The strategies refer to the approaches the Network employs to achieve its political purpose: How does the Network propose to generate results that will fulfil its purpose? Since an international network is composed of organisations rooted in the reality of different countries, the strategies necessarily are of a general nature. Nonetheless, the

[5] The first three are based on Madeline Church, et al.

relevance or not of the strategies that a Network develops is one of the elements that determines if its activities will have social impact or not.

Organisation and management

A Network operationalises its strategies through *lines of action.* These are systematic, continual processes that produce results on different levels and of varying importance, all of course to fulfil its purpose. The lines of action are similar to programmes and projects in other kinds of organisations. The difference in a Network is that the emphasis is more on the action or the process than on achieving pre-determined SMART objectives[6]. Furthermore, responsibility for the activities is more dispersed and the operational units—the members as well as the secretariat—operate with a high degree of autonomy.

In a Network, efficiency and effectiveness depend on structure, operational management, institutional capacity, and communication.

Within a Network *structure,* instead of an executive office there is a body whose function is co-ordination and facilitation. This entity steers the Network's strategies and actions, articulating them with the activities of individual members. The operation of this secretariat may include projects with precise objectives that can be readily evaluated. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that the local activities, and the changes they bring about, are principally the responsibility of the individual members.

In contrast to other types of organisations, in a Network *operational management* focuses on enhancing collective, democratic, horizontal and diverse activities of members rooted in specific local realities. Management is guided by the common purpose, which is the basis for trust and gives coherence to the multiple activities. Consequently, the secretariat, as the key component of operational management for the network, co-ordinates more than it administers programmes.

As in any organisation, the *institutional capacity* of a Network depends to some extent on the people in positions of responsibility. Decision-makers should be qualified for their specific tasks, just as the material and financial resources should be appropriate for the activities of the Network. Furthermore, the institutional capacity of a Network is based upon the capacity of its members. Consequently, a Network strives to empower and strengthen its members through training, exchange of information and mutual support. It develops and takes advantage of the resources and energy of all its organisational components, thus multiplying and compounding the effect of individual efforts.

For every social organisation, *communication* is important; in a Network, it is vital. A Network is essentially a complex of human relations, and their quality and characteristics determine success. Due to its character, a Network promotes social mobilisation, generates technical, political and financial support and involves external actors. Therefore, it must create complementarity, synergy and strategic alliances. Consequently, communication is as much an organising and management function as it is one of information exchange. Furthermore, an

[6] Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

international network is intercultural, requiring understanding across great distances and social and cultural differences. For all these reasons, the communication function is central to success or failure in a Network.

Leadership and participation

For a Network, everything related to leadership and participation is as important as its strategies, organisation, and management, because the values of democracy are intrinsic to its nature. A Network aims to be more that an association of like-minded organisations. Common agreement on the strategies is as important as selecting the right strategies. Similarly, the Network action should be more than the sum of the individual activities of its members. To achieve this "added value", decision-making processes must be characterised by a democratic leadership and the active involvement of the members. Also, there must be many opportunities for all members to participate in the activities of the Network and collaborate with each other. More concretely:

- Decision-making requires as much agreement about *who* should participate in *which* decisions as it does broad participation in making specific decisions.

- The participation of those who make up a Network is fundamental for its sustenance and endurance; it is a source of for enrichment and strengthening the Network. Effective participation depends on a mix of different factors—the opportunities, funding, time available, interest, commitment and above all trust.

- Co-ordination is basic to a healthy Network that generates synergy. This depends heavily on a leadership that enhances internal management and the presence and influence in the wider world.

Initial proposal of indicators

For greater clarity about the potential inter-relations between the performance criteria and the operational dimensions, as well as to order the analytical framework, we propose a set of possible indicators for evaluating a Network. We realise that these are tentative and rough. They are presented in the following table.

POSSIBLE INDICATORS FOR THE EVALUATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL CHANGE NETWORK

PERFORMANCE CRITERIA	OPERATIONAL DIMENSIONS		
	Political purpose and strategies	**Organisation and management**	**Leadership and participation**
Democracy*	• *Vision and mission are shared.* • *Members have a sense of belonging*	• *The Network focuses on the essential—fulfilling its political purpose.* • *All the members collaborate in the activities.* • *The members contribute and have equitable access to the resources (people, funds, goods and services) and reputation of the Network.* • *The structure is not hierarchical.*	• *The decision-making process is considered just, inclusive and effective.* • *Participation is generalised and voluntary.*
Diversity*	• *The political positions and ideological contributions of all members are reflected in the strategies of the Network.*	• *The range of opinions and ideas of the members have a place in the activities of the Network.* • *Importance is given to building relationships of trust internally and externally.* • *The human and financial base of the Network is sufficiently broad to avoid the dependence of many on a few.*	• *The diversity of members is appropriate for the Network's purpose and strategies.* • *The strategies are developed with the contribution of all of the members.* • *The interaction between the members is creative and constructive.*
Dynamism*	• *The priority is to act.* • *Goals are pursued seizing the opportunities and adjusting to obstacles without losing sight of the political purpose.* • *The Network learns from experience. Achievements serve as a basis for reformulating the strategies.*	• *The responsibility and authority is effectively balanced between that vested in the secretariat or co-ordinating entity and that decentralised to other bodies of decision-making and execution.* • *The structure is light, facilitative and supportive. The rules are minimal.* • *The resources expand and contract, quantitatively and qualitatively, according to the strategic needs.*	• *The members take initiative and influence the development of the Network.* • *The co-ordination between the members is constant and effective.* • *Co-ordination with other networks on common action issues is effective.* • *All the members contribute to and benefit from the achievements.* • *The effect and impact are more than the sum of the activities of the individual members.*
Excellence	• *The social changes that are pursued are clearly defined.* • *The strategies are based on an up-to-date analysis of the environment.* • *The strategies and lines of action are coherent with the social changes the Network seeks.* • *There is a clear organisational identity embraced internally and externally.* • *The Network achieves results at the local and international levels.* • *The Network has impact—it achieves structural, long-term changes.*	• *Work is planned, monitored and evaluated.* • *Policies on how the Network should and should not function are followed.* • *The financial function is well structured.* • *Internal communication is effective.* • *The qualifications of the staff of the Network are suitable to their responsibilities.* • *The assets—material or immaterial—are appropriate for the requirements of the strategic lines of action.* • *A financial strategy is pursued and the financial resources are adequately managed.* • *The Network is autonomous—it decides on and defines its own paths.* • *Learning is a basis for innovation*	• *The membership is active.* • *Members participate as much as they desire, and their contribution is recognised.* • *There is sufficient opportunity to participate in processes of reflection and decision-making.* • *Conflicts are resolved.* • *Decision-making processes are solid.* • *The Network is able to involve and lead other social actors.* • *Alliances contribute to the implementation of the lines of action.* • *Alliances lead to the formulation of new strategies.* • *Members become more effective and committed actors and protagonists.* • *The Network effectively dialogues and negotiates with other social actors.*

Source: Martha Nuñez and Ricardo Wilson-Grau. *Based *on* Madeline Church, et al 2003

Assessing the results

This methodological proposal for evaluating the performance of an international social change network is a tentative, initial step. We recognise that our reflections about assessing the results are even more rudimentary and, undoubtedly, debatable.

We consider that it is of fundamental importance for a Network to identify and comprehend its internal and external achievements, including its impact—understood as durable structural change. Notwithstanding, the evaluation of the impact of a Network becomes extremely complex, as complex as the structure and operation of an international political movement.

For example, concerning the *internal achievements*, one of the principal results of great validity and importance is the Network's existence and permanence over time. We know that this is an unconventional criteria for evaluation. A for-profit business can rarely justify itself by the number of employees; its principal results are measured by a margin of profit and return on investment. Sometimes the major achievement of a government may be simply to have finished its term of office, but usually its results are evaluated in terms of the quantity and quality of its contribution to the common good. An NGO cannot exist to exist; the NGO must benefit other people. In a Network, however, the results are the fruit of a collective effort of all the members. With the support of the Network, they reinforce each other and advance together with joint strategies to achieve their common purpose. If the Network functions effectively and efficiently, it strengthens and develops the web of organisations and relationships that make it up. That is, the existence of the Network is itself an inter-active, innovative process with added value for its members.

The success of a Network also is a function of its *external achievements*. Of course, we are evaluating the results of a political movement. How do you evaluate external achievements when they are intangibles such as awareness-raising, empowerment, solidarity, and equity between people and in society? We believe, on the one hand, that these results are difficult to measure, at least with any conventional methods and instruments. On the other, they can only be measured indirectly, through the results that flow from them. That is, greater awareness, empowerment, solidarity or equity are identified through the actions, the processes and the changes they bring about.

For example, the achievement of empowerment can be recognised in the manner in which people more actively assume responsibilities, propose and build their relationships, and present and defend their demands before authorities and other actors. An external evaluator, however, rarely can, directly and independently, perceive greater power in another organisation, group of people or a community. With limited time, he or she can at best obtain signs of change by examining documents or interviewing people. In contrast, the members of the organisation, the group or community, through their common struggle, and by reflecting before and after the event, can formulate a judgement, systematize events and measure progress. Thus, evaluating these external achievements of a Network requires a different exercise.

Regarding *impact*, we believe that to achieve it, and to be aware of having achieved it, is vital for a Network. It is, at the end of the day, a Network's political reason for being. Nevertheless, the evaluation of durable social change

achieved by any organisation is a complex endeavour currently subject to intense debate.[7] To begin, the definition of what is "impact" is controversial, and much more so is the discussion about how to measure it. The complexity grows when we try to evaluate the impact of a Network, because of its political nature and organisational characteristics.

Since a Network is an association with the aim of changing relations of power, made up of diverse national organisations with their own missions and objectives, the problems in evaluating impact are double-edged. First, how do you measure changes in the power processes of societies that are indefinite in time, occur in heterogeneous contexts and do not depend on the decisions of the network or its members? Second, when there is a change that represents impact: Who can assume credit for the change? Who is accountable, and to whom and how?

In summary, there appears to be an emerging consensus that it is illusory to attempt to identify relations of cause and impact, at least for an international network. It is very difficult to determine which impact can be attributed to one organisation and which not. It is even less possible to know to what degree one or another organisation has contributed to lasting structural results.[8] To date, it seems to us the most objective criteria is maintained by authors[9] who argue that the best guarantee of impact in a Network is the relevance of its strategies and their coherence with the activities. That is, perhaps the closest we can get to understanding the impact of a Network is by evaluating its performance.

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[7] See, for example, Chris Roche, and Jennifer Chapman and Amboka Wameyo.

[8] See: Madeline Church, et al and Marilee Karl.

[9] Marilee Karl.

POSSIBLE INDICATORS FOR THE EVALUATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL CHANGE NETWORK – edited version, Church and Kiriwandeniya

PERFORMANCE CRITERIA	OPERATIONAL DIMENSIONS		
	Political purpose and strategies	**Organisation and management**	**Leadership and participation**
Democracy*	• *Vision and mission are shared.* • *Members have a sense of belonging*	• *The Network focuses on the essential—fulfilling its political purpose.* • *All the members have the opportunity to collaborate in activities that make best use of their skills and contribution.* ** • *The members have equitable access to the resources (people, funds, goods and services) and reputation of the Network.* • *The structure is not hierarchical.*	• *The decision-making process is considered just, inclusive and effective.* • *Participation is generalised and voluntary.*
Diversity*	• *The strategies of the network reflect the range of political positions in the network.* **	• *The range of opinions and ideas of the members have a place in the activities of the Network.* • *Importance is given to building relationships of trust internally and externally.* • *Conflicts don't paralyse the network's capacity to act*** • *The human and financial base of the Network is sufficiently broad to avoid the dependence of many on a few.*	• *The diversity of members is appropriate for the Network's purpose and strategies. Members are enriched by the difference***.* • *The strategies are developed with the contribution of all of the members.* • *The interaction between the members is creative and constructive.*
Dynamism*	• *The priority is to act.* • *Goals are pursued seizing the opportunities and adjusting to obstacles without losing sight of the political purpose.* • *The Network learns from experience. Achievements serve as a basis for reformulating the strategies.*	• *The responsibility and authority is effectively balanced between that vested in the secretariat or co-ordinating entity and that decentralised to other bodies of decision-making and execution.* • *The structure is light, facilitative and supportive. The rules are minimal.* • *Organisational culture is in tune with network principles – it 'thinks' and 'acts' as a network, not an institution*** • *The resources expand and contract, quantitatively and qualitatively, according to the strategic needs.*	• *The members take initiative and influence the development of the Network.* • *The co-ordination between the members is effective.* • *All the members contribute to and benefit from the achievements.* • *The effect and impact are more than the sum of the activities of the individual members.*
Excellence	• *The social changes that are pursued are clearly defined.* • *The strategies are based on an up-to-date analysis of the environment.* • *The strategies and lines of action are coherent with the social changes the Network seeks.* • *There is a clear organisational identity embraced internally and externally.* • *The Network achieves results at the local and international levels.* • *The Network is a key player in the work ** to achieve structural, long-term change.*	• *Work is planned, monitored and evaluated.* • *Policies on how the Network should and should not function are followed.* • *The financial function is well structured.* • *Internal communication is effective.* • *The Network understands what qualities and skills are needed in the Coordinating Function, and people are managed in ways that allow those skills and qualities to be utilised.* ** • *The assets—material or immaterial—are appropriate for the requirements of the strategic lines of action.* • *A financial strategy is pursued and the financial resources are adequately managed.* • *Learning is a basis for innovation*	• *Leadership combines co-ordination, facilitation,, new ideas, and encourages innovation, and focus,*** • *Leadership is not just vested in the coordination function, but emerges around the network where appropriate to activities or issues.* ** • *The Network is able to involve and lead other social actors.* • *Alliances contribute to the implementation of the lines of action and lead to the formulation of new strategies.* • *Members become more effective and committed actors and protagonists.*

** These aspects have either been added or changed, Church & Kiriwandeniya 2003

APPENDIX IV

Introduction to Networks: a workshop designed for IANSA (International Action Network on Small Arms)

CHURCH, M. & JOSS, S. (2003)

Workshop: Introduction to Networks

Aim: the aim of this workshop is to look at the basics of working in networks, using some simple practical exercises. By the end, you should know more about what all those involved have to offer in terms of time, energy, resources, etc and how you can plan to work together on some activities.

The workshop includes:

- ***Basic ideas of what a network is and how it operates***
- ***Contributions Assessment - the resources we can pool***
- ***Weaver's Triangle - How activities and process inter-relate***
- ***Leadership - qualities that are needed***

Introductions

Pair up with someone else and find out two things about them that you didn't know already. Make sure they are things they don't mind being repeated to the rest of the group.

Introduce your partner to the rest of the group, using their name, organisation and the two things you discovered in your chat

Exercise 1

This will give you a quick understanding of how those you are planning to work with see a network.

Draw your own image of a network. How would you represent a network?

After you have finished talk in pairs about your image and what it means to you.

Display these drawings where you can see them as you work through the rest of the workshop

Input 1

The basics of a network. [Using the Checklist for networks]

A network has:

- **A common purpose** derived from shared perceived need for **action**
- **Clear objectives** and **focus**
- **A non-hierarchical** structure

A network encourages

- **Voluntary participation** and **commitment**
- **The input** of resources by members for benefit of all

A network provides

- **Benefit** derived from participation and linking

What does a network do?

- Facilitate shared space for exchange, learning, development – the capacity-building aspect
- Act for change in areas where none of members is working in systematic way – the advocacy, lobbying and campaigning aspect
- Include a range of stakeholders – the diversity/ broad-reach aspect

What are the guiding principles and values?

- Collaborative action - undertaking activities together linked to the common purpose. This does not mean all activities have to be done together
- Respect for diversity - we all do different things in different ways. This is what gives the network its dynamic, creative quality
- Enabling marginalised voices to be heard - everyone has something to contribute
- Acknowledgement of power differences, and commitment to equality

There are four Ds to remember

Diversity: we all do different things in different ways. This is what gives the network its dynamic, creative quality. Do not undermine or rubbish other people's work behind their back, even if you don't agree with it. Talk it through

Dynamism: Have the minimum structure and rules necessary to do the work. Ensure governance is light, not strangling. The more rules you have, the more 'control' creeps in. Give members space to be dynamic, and encourage those who want to contribute to do so.

Democracy: Ensure that those with least resources and power have the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way. Stay away from voting if you can - this squeezes out the dissenting voices.

Decentralisation: At the centre, make only the decisions that are vital to continued functioning. Make core decisions, not more decisions. Push decision-making outwards.

Discussion

Exercise 2: What contribution can we make?

Contributions Assessment The underlying philosophy

A **network** thrives on the drive, commitment and passion of its members. It is the combination of **diversity** (many autonomous institutions and individuals) **and a common purpose**, which gives a network power and energy. It is thus vital for a network to know what resources its members have and would be prepared to contribute and share. The aim of a contributions assessment is to hook into where

the energy lies for the members, and involve people through their passion and drive to make a difference.

A Contributions Assessment aims to find out what people might **contribute**.

Using index cards, write your name/name of organisation on the top, and your contribution underneath. Use a separate card for each input.
Be as specific as possible. Avoid general categories at this stage

E.g: Name/Organisation
Contribution: collating and writing up the monitoring of our government's progress on Plan of Action

Contribution: training of grass-roots organisations in non-violent direct action

Contribution: coordination and faciliation of meetings with government

Contribution: research on flow of weapons in this region

Now work together to group the contributions under different headings. These might be research / lobbying / funding / office space / annual activities week....

Discussion and Reality check:

Can we actually contribute what we have said we will? Do we have lots of organisations contributing the same thing? Where are the gaps? Might we need to ask others to complement in areas where we are weaker?

You are not trying to answer everything and solve all issues at this stage. The exercise is intended to reveal how many resources you have and how you might best use them, and can be taken forward into a more detailed planning process later on.

Exercise 3

Circles of Participation: valuing diversity and dynamism

Given the thought you have put into what you might contribute, can you imagine where you might be on the circles? If you wish to participate a small amount, place yourself on the outer areas; if you think you can contribute a lot of energy and time, place yourself in the inner area. This will bring you all onto the same picture and tell you a lot about how much dynamic energy people have to offer. Again the idea here is to reveal in a different way how much people want to participate, so that we all know the level of commitment each might make. It also allows you a snapshot of where you are now. You can do this exercise again a year later, and compare the two to assess what has happened with participation levels in the network

Exercise 4

We decide what we are going to do together - this is what we our overall aim is
We do not do everything together, just that particular aspect. The rest of our work we do individually

Weaver's Triangle
Work together as a group. You should put your overall aim for working together at the top.
You can then fill it in. You do not need to work in any particular order. Often it is easier to start with activities, then work upwards and think about why you are doing them. There is no right answer. The exercise is intended to show you how clear your thinking is, and how your activities link up to what you are trying to achieve in the longer term.

Process goals: these are very important in a network. They show how much work needs to be done if we are to work together effectively. Don't ignore them just because you want to get on and 'do' something. Think about how you will build trust, facilitate meetings and decision-making, share ideas and resources.

5 - Discussion: What do we mean by leadership in a network?

Leadership is often talked about as if it is something a person does. This can mean that we think more about leaders and less about what the important aspects of leadership are.

Probably the most important and dynamic part of the success of a network is how we understand and foster leadership and co-ordination. This may well be best expressed as 'facilitative leadership'. **Such leadership may be shared out around the network**.

These are some aspects of leadership. These do not have to be something one person does. However, it helps if you have the capacity in the core of the network to cover them. If you have a secretariat, some of this can be done by them.

The discussion can add to / complement this basic list:

Knowing the territory: this includes a broad understanding of the range of members, other actors in the field, the resources available, the needs, and the history
Catching the opportunities: keeping an eye out for opportunities or international events that could bring people together, or provide a good moment for joint activities (such as the International Year of...., or an upcoming thematic conference)
Making connections outside the network: making the connections between regions, building and maintaining relationships with other networks
Seeing the assets and building on the strengths: when you know what people can offer you can work with those assets and existing resources, and build on those strengths
Keeping people engaged and finding ways to encourage those who may be excluded
Being inventive: providing something fresh and interesting
Being clear and transparent: clarity of aims or objectives helps everyone to see where they fit in
Mediating and building consensus: conflict is normal in a network. Leadership is required to help build consensus and to give space to everyone's ideas

6 - Close

Return to the image of a network. Has your image changed? What might you add or take away? Would you like to redraw it? If so, how?

Hand-out 1

NETWORK BASICS

A network has

- **A common purpose** derived from shared perceived need for **action**
- **Clear objectives** and **focus**
- **A non-hierarchical** structure

A network encourages

- **Voluntary participation** and **commitment**
- **The input** of resources by members for benefit of all

A network provides

- **Benefit** derived from participation and linking

What does a network do?

- Facilitate shared space for exchange, learning, development – the capacity-building aspect
- Act for change in areas where none of members is working in systematic way – the advocacy, lobbying and campaigning aspect
- Include a range of stakeholders – the diversity/ broad-reach aspect

What are the guiding principles and values?

- Collaborative action - undertaking activities together linked to the common purpose. This does not mean all activities have to be done together
- Respect for diversity - we all do different things in different ways. This is what gives the network its dynamic, creative quality
- Enabling marginalised voices to be heard - everyone has something to contribute
- Acknowledgement of power differences, and commitment to equality

There are four Ds to remember

Diversity: we all do different things in different ways. This is what gives the network its dynamic, creative quality. Do not undermine or rubbish other people's work behind their back, even if you don't agree with it. Talk it through

Dynamism: Have the minimum structure and rules necessary to do the work. Ensure governance is light, not strangling. The more rules you have, the more 'control' creeps in. Give members space to be dynamic, and encourage those who want to contribute to do so.

Democracy: Ensure that those with least resources and power have the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way. Stay away from voting if you can - this squeezes out the dissenting voices.

Decentralisation: At the centre, make only the decisions that are vital to continued functioning. Make core decisions, not more decisions. Push decision-making outwards.

How do we do what we do, in accordance with our principles and values?

Building Participation

- Knowing the membership, what each can put in, and what each seeks to gain
- Valuing what people can put in and making it possible for them to do so
- Ensuring membership is appropriate to the purpose and tasks
- Encouraging members to be realistic about what they can give
- Ensuring access to decision-making and opportunities to reflect on achievements

Building Relationships and Trust

- Spending time on members getting to know each other, especially face-to-face
- Coordination point/secretariat has relationship-building as vital part of work
- Members/secretariat build relations with others outside network - strategic individuals and institutions

Facilitative Leadership (may be one person, or rotating, or a team)

- Emphasis on quality of input rather than control
- Knowledgeable about issues, context and opportunities,
- Defining a vision and articulating aims
- Balancing the creation of forward momentum and action, with generating consensus
- Understanding the dynamics of conflict and how to transform relations
- Promoting regular monitoring and participatory evaluation

Fostering diversity and dynamism

'too loose a structure ..drains potential and continuity, and too heavy a structure .. stifles initiative and innovation'. (Networks for Development, 2000:28)

- Have the minimum structure and rules necessary to do the work. Ensure governance is light, not strangling. Give members space to be dynamic.
- Encourage all those who can make a contribution to the overall goal to do so, even if it is small.

Working toward decentralised and democratic governance

- At the centre, make only the decisions that are vital to continued functioning. Push decision-making outwards.
- Ensure that those with least resources and power have the opportunity to participate in a meaningful way.

Building Capacity

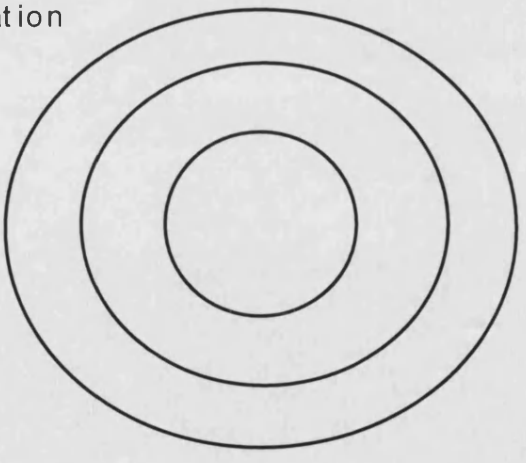
- Encourage all to share the expertise they have to offer. Seek out additional expertise that is missing.

Hand-out 2

CIRCLES OF PARTICIPATION

The outer ring indicates a more remote relationship with the network, while the inner one indicates a more active and involved relationship. Can you imagine where you might be on the circles? If you wish to participate a small amount, place yourself on the outer areas; if you think you can contribute a lot of energy and time, place yourself in the inner area. This will bring you all onto the same picture and tell you a lot about how much dynamic energy people have to offer. Again the idea here is to reveal in a different way how much people want to participate, so that we all know the level of commitment each might make. It also allows you a snapshot of where you are now. You can do this exercise again a year later, and compare the two to assess what has happened with participation levels in the network

Circles of participation



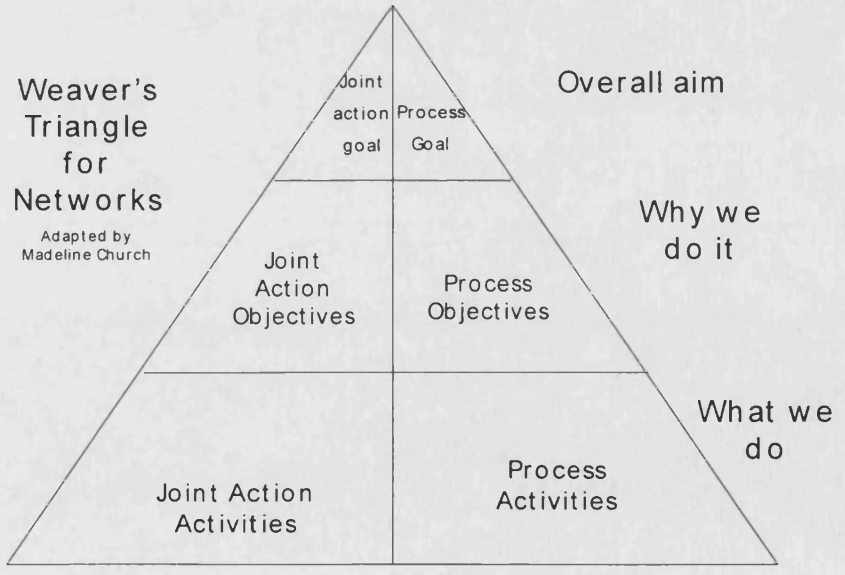
Hand-out 3

WEAVER'S TRIANGLE FOR NETWORKS
A simple way to clarify aims, objectives and activities

This tool is a simple exercise to distinguish ***what*** you do from ***why*** you are doing it. It helps you to see how you ***link*** what you do to why you are doing it, and what the ***underlying theory*** of your work is.

Work together as a group. You should put your overall aim for working together at the top. You can then fill it in. You do not need to work in any particular order. Often it is easier to start with activities, then work upwards and think about why you are doing them. There is no right answer. The exercise is intended to show you how clear your thinking is, and how your activities link up to what you are trying to achieve in the longer term.

Process goals: these are very important in a network. They show how much work needs to be done if we are to work together effectively. Don't ignore them just because you want to get on and 'do' something. Think about how you will build trust, facilitate meetings and decision-making, share ideas and resources.



Hand-out 4

ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is often talked about as if it is something a person does. This can mean that we think more about leaders and less about what the important aspects of leadership are.

Probably the most important and dynamic part of the success of a network is how we understand and foster leadership and co-ordination. This may well be best expressed as 'facilitative leadership'. **Such leadership may be shared out around the network**.

These are some aspects of leadership. These do not have to be something one person does. However, it helps if you have the capacity in the core of the network to cover them. If you have a secretariat, some of this can be done by them.

- Knowing the territory: this includes a broad understanding of the range of members, other actors in the field, the resources available, the needs, and the history

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- Keeping people engaged and finding ways to encourage those who may be excluded

- Being inventive: providing something fresh and interesting

- Being clear and transparent: clarity of aims or objectives helps everyone to see where they fit in

- Mediating and building consensus: conflict is normal in a network. Leadership is required to help build consensus and to give space to everyone's ideas

Remember, leadership is about quality of input, rather than control.

APPENDIX V

COLOMBIA FORUM
Issue 22
JAN – MAY 2000
CHURCH, M.

COLOMBIA FORUM UPDATE No. 22: EVENTS IN COLOMBIA BETWEEN JANUARY AND MAY 2000

Based on Actualidad Colombiana (a bulletin produced by a consortium of Colombian non-governmental organisations) and on other press articles and reports from the UN and NGOs.

This Update will seek to highlight the major and important developments in Colombia over the past five months, and to capture the current trends. It will concentrate on the developments surrounding international aid, on the current political crisis and the peace process.

Introduction

The period of this Update sees the continuing struggle of Pastrana's administration to secure increased military aid from the United States, and development aid from Europe, Canada, and Japan. Pastrana is faced with a deepening political crisis at home, with corruption scandals threatening to close congress, bring down his government, or force a referendum. This coupled with rumours of plans for a coup of some kind, either externally directed or Fujimori-style, from within, generate spiralling confusing from the electorate on the political future. At the same time, the peace process with the FARC is coming under ever-increasing pressure from extremists while considerable efforts from civil society bodies aim to re-launch the putative process with the ELN.

Human Rights Watch produces a highly controversial report on links between Colombia's security forces and the paramilitary groups, using evidence from the Colombian Prosecutors Office. The UN Human Rights Commission makes another statement on the serious situation in Colombia, and the US State Department report again makes for grim reading.

Figures for displacement continued to rise during 1999, and new geographical areas are being affected by the struggle for strategic control by armed actors. People continue to leave the country in ever-increasing numbers.

The country's prison system is plunged into crisis by the outbreak of almost total war in La Modelo prison in Bogotá, leaving 32 people dead. An ex-advisor to the prison service outlines what prison is like for those convicted or on remand.

Contents:

1. Plan Colombia: The cure is worse than the disease

Plan Colombia, a development plan that the Pastrana administration is seeking to fund through international donors, first appeared on the political agenda in 1998 and since that time has undergone a considerable transformation.

Originally conceived as a kind of Marshall Plan for Colombia, one that would tackle some of the worst inequities in social development in the regions most affected by the decades-long conflict, it has now become a controversial anti-narcotics strategy, warped by the real-politik of Colombia's geo-strategic proximity to the United States. Plan Colombia now contains $US1.7b of US assistance to the Colombian military for its 'war on drugs', designated as a 'push into Southern Colombia' in order to re-take a zone controlled by the FARC.

Alongside this part of the Plan, some $US1.3b is being sought for humanitarian,

social development and infrastructure aid, largely from the European Union states, Norway, Switzerland, Canada, and Japan. The Colombian Government itself has pledged $4b from its national budget and Peace Bonds. It is not clear where this money is to come from, given the serious fiscal deficit and a recent round of substantial spending cuts from the already agreed national budget. More cuts are likely if the reforms Colombian Government has signed up to as part of an IMF structural adjustment package pass through the Congress.

The US part of the package, despite consistent vocal support from President Clinton, is currently mired in domestic squabbles in the US Senate. Passed by the Congress, its route through the Senate has proved more complicated. The Clinton administration has attempted to force the package through the emergency appropriations procedure. Leader of the Senate Trent Lott supports the Colombia package, but believes that the Clinton administration is abusing this emergency procedure by swelling it out with non-emergency funding for other issues. At the same time, those Senators who believe that the anti-narcotic policy as represented by this Colombia bill is flawed and could lead to increased human rights abuses, have introduced serious monitoring amendments to the package and re-formulated the funding spread. Clinton has threatened to veto the Bill should it pass in its amended state.

The vote by the Senate on the Bill has now been postponed until the early July. Those in support of the full military package are claiming that the delays are fatally undermining the Pastrana administration and seriously damaging the 'war on drugs'. What is clear is that in a US Presidential election year, drugs is high on the domestic agenda, and this package may have less to do with the so-called regional threat that Colombia poses and more to do with elections.

In Europe, the Spanish and British governments are leading the effort to bring the non-US states on board with what is known as European Plan Colombia. This has also undergone several changes, largely led by an attempt to dis-articulate this plan from the US package. While in the US doubting Congressional and Senate representatives have been assured that the carrot of social and humanitarian support will be provided by the Europeans, in Europe the concerns over an increased militarisation of the South of Colombia has encouraged the Government of Colombia to erase any mention of military aid at all from the Plan. Meetings to discuss levels of possible support are going on all over Europe, with two official meetings planned for 19th June in London, and 7th July in Madrid. The Government of Colombia is seeking substantial support for its entire emergency response to the internally displaced population, and for long-term social and alternative development, and infrastructure reconstruction.

The overall proposal has unleashed a fierce controversy with respect to the consequences of this aid on human rights and the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict. Several members of Congress, intellectuals and the media have warned that its approval could involve the US in a new conflict that they do not hesitate to compare with Vietnam. They point to the dangers that could result from giving aid to an army that has long been accused of having paramilitary links, a topic raised again in recent international human rights reports. It has also been heavily criticised inside Colombia for the lack of consultation with civil and elected organisations and institutions (there are persistent rumours that the document was actually written in the offices of the US State Department), for the flawed analysis on which it is based, and its potentially negative impact on the peace process.

Lack of discussion and consultation on the Plan inside Colombia has fuelled rumour and confusion. According to some Colombian academics, it is unclear whether Plan Colombia is a state policy paper, a request for a loan, or how it relates to the current government's Development Plan (a plan that has to be approved by the legislature at the beginning of the government's term of office)

Colombian NGOs, social organisations and academics have unanimously condemned the Plan as one that will fuel the conflict and contribute to a more serious deterioration of the country's humanitarian crisis. (The 'push into Southern Colombia is officially estimated to lead to the forced displacement of over 10,000 small growers.) While the Plan is supposed to be a 'Plan for Peace', evidence suggests that the FARC is reacting speedily to the potential for military escalation in its heartland. There has been a significant increase in kidnappings and extortion by the FARC in the last few months, in particular, in the central department of Cundinamarca and the capital Bogota. The FARC issued Law 002 in early May, by which it is demanding that anyone worth over US$1m must voluntarily pay a war tax to the FARC or face extortion. Rumours from the southern region indicate that forced recruitment and arming has dramatically increased and that internal displacement has been fuelled by fears and insecurity. The FARC have reportedly set themselves the goal of raising US$600 million at any cost so as not to fall behind in the arms race.

Plan Colombia is essentially a strategy of defence and security aimed at strengthening the armed forces and police in the fight against drugs, justified by claims of reduced national resources for these issues. However, the increase in defence spending has gone from US$1.5m at the beginning of the last decade to US$2.2m by the end, representing 4.5% of GDP.

Plan Colombia is ambitious in economic terms. Funding to the value of US$ 7,5b is being sought within a two year period. Of this figure, US$ 3,5bis being requested in aid mainly from the United States and Europe, with some help from Asian countries, in addition to US$733 in loans from multilateral organisations such as the Interamerican Development Bank. The Colombian Nation will contribute US$ 4b. The source of Colombia's own contribution remains unclear; the country is going through its worst economic crisis in the last few decades and industry is in decline. The fiscal deficit is close to 5% of GDP, the official figure for unemployment has hovered around 20% for several months and there are no recovery symptoms. Under these circumstances the government plans to raise funds through privatisation, (e.g. from the electricity industry) but these resources have already been committed. The only way left is by credit, but debt service has gone from representing 19.1% of GDP in the last decade, to 41%.

2. Political crisis – Pastrana in trouble?

While the on-going struggle to raise funds is being played out in the international arena, at home President Pastrana is mired in a corruption and political crisis which threatens his credibility abroad and is prompting some commentators to predict that he wont see out his term. Elected on a broad alliance against corruption, The Alliance for Change, Pastrana's administration is now suffering corruption scandals of its own. These emerged after Pastrana had proposed a 17 point national referendum aimed at purging corruption. The measure includes the dissolution of the current Congress and new elections. The move rocked the political terrain: the Liberals abandoned the Alliance for Change, with which Pastrana's administration had managed to constitute a fictitious majority in the Congress. Corruption allegations were made against Pastrana's closest staff who are accused of using an inter-ministerial fund to buy votes in Congress.

Juan Hernandez, General Secretary of the President's Office; Virgilio Galvis, the Health Minister; and Néstor Humberto Martínez, the Home Secretary, all resigned. Martínez was quickly replaced by the Ambassador to the UK, Humberto de la Calle Lombana, as a way to bring the Liberals back on board. The resignation was followed by a presidential address calling for a 'grand national cross-party agreement' on the fundamental issues of international relations, drug trafficking, the economic agenda and the peace talks. However, many sectors have expressed their concern that this will end in just another power-sharing agreement, as is traditionally the case in Colombian politics. In the interim, the Executive decided to withdraw the referendum proposal and use an

alternative mechanism to hold a referendum that bypasses Congress.

Congress in return proposed an alternative referendum to establish a Constituent Assembly, and Horacio Serpa, the Liberal candidate beaten by Pastrana at the last election, has offered to agree to a referendum if Pastrana himself resigns and stands for re-election. Currently, there are three differing referendum proposals on the table, which all may be put to the electorate on the same day. However, the Public Prosecutor and the Attorney General have made it clear that Colombia does not need more laws in order to fight corruption as the existing ones are sufficient. What is needed is the political will to make progress in the anti-corruption struggle.

At the same time, however, rumours of clandestine documents and plans for a coup have re-emerged. There is no doubt that the leader of the paramilitary umbrella the AUC, Carlos Castaño, is building a political career, and some say that he is leading the plans for a coup should the peace talks fail. Earlier in the year he gave his first full-face interview to the media, claiming to represent the middle-classes in Colombia who have been victims of the guerrilla. Opinion polls taken after this interview was televised indicated a significant level of popularity. At the same time, others are talking about the existence of a Memorandum of Intent between the FARC and Pastrana, which would extend his term for two years and bring the key political power holders into a National Constituent Assembly with the FARC to address issues of political reform.

The Social and Political Front – an opportunity in the crisis

The political crisis seems to have given new energy and direction to the left. The Social and Political Front, launched on 12th April, brings together different social sectors including political movements such as the Unión Patriótica (the Patriotic Union), the Colombian Communist Party and the Corriente de Renovación Socialista (Socialist Renovation Movement); the principal workers' unions led by the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (Workers' Unions Umbrella Group-CUT); the Network of Citizens' Initiatives against the War and in favour of Peace, (REDEPAZ) and the Comisión de Conciliación Nacional (National Conciliation Commission).

The Front recognises that it will have to overcome some serious obstacles if it is to be a viable political alternative to the traditional political parties which have held power for more than 150 years. It will also need to protect itself against attack by extreme right-wing groups that have so often violently silenced the political alternatives in Colombia, the most representative case being the genocide committed against the Patriotic Union. Finally, the real challenge is to overcome the historic divisions in the left itself, which has helped to marginalise it as a political force.

Luis Eduardo Garzón, president of the CUT and the driving force behind the Front, described it as an open space for debate, tolerant yet critical, with "colour, flavour and aroma": a collective project that will respect and tolerate diverse regional identities as well as the autonomy and identity of the social and political movements that form it . He hopes that the organisation will unite those in search of alternative politics.

At the launch Garzon stated that the Front supports a negotiated political solution to the armed conflict. He condemned the blowing up of electricity pylons by the ELN, the massive roadblock kidnappings and all actions against the civilian population. He strongly criticised Plan Colombia and current government's policies for causing a polarisation of society, a military escalation of the conflict and for delaying solutions to the most urgent problems of the country such as unemployment and poverty. He entered the referendum debate, calling for a popular constituent assembly that would make profound democratic reforms to regional and national life. He demanded that the traditional political class represented by the Liberal and Conservative parties take responsibility for the current situation of the country: a decrease of 5% in GDP, unemployment at 20% and underemployment at 58%. Regarding the economic model, he proposed the development of a mixed and plural economy, in which the state would be

responsible for social security, sovereignty, public services and basic social services. Lastly he proposed that the first national congress of the Front be held on 20 July this year.

3. The Peace Process – Under fire from extremists

Peace and the FARC

The Peace Process with the FARC is slowly recovering from one of its worst crises to date. On 15 May in the municipality of Chiquinquirá, (Boyacá), Doña Elvia Cortés had her head blown off by a necklace bomb that had been glued round her neck, allegedly as punishment for refusing to pay an extortion demand to the FARC. The local police struggled for six hours to remove it but it blew up before they succeeded, causing further casualties. Within three hours Generals Rosso José Serrano, Director of the National Police Force and Fernando Tapias, Commander in Chief of the Military Forces had blamed the FARC for this abominable act. The Government immediately suspended a proposed international meeting between 21 country representatives, the FARC and the government negotiating commission, due to be held on 29-30 May in the demilitarised zone. The United States supported Pastrana's stand. The FARC called a press conference in which they categorically denied responsibility for the killing and put the up-coming negotiations on ice. By the weekend, after initial investigations by the relevant authorities, the new High Commissioner for Peace, Camilo Gómez, stated that there was less and less evidence that the guerrillas of the FARC were responsible for the 'necklace bomb'.

Analysis of this latest grotesque outrage indicates that there are serious opponents who are taking more extreme measures to upset the process. The international meeting has now been re-instituted for the end of June, but no one is in any doubt as to the continuing fragility of the process.

The agenda for negotiations – inching forward

Formal negotiations have now started, with three issues to be discussed in the first 18-month period: the socio-economic model; human rights and international humanitarian law, and political reform, in that order. An arrangement has been agreed to avoid the process becoming blocked on a particular issue. If disagreements persist, a second round will be initiated, and following that, a record will be made and the talks will proceed to the next point so that the process is not paralysed.

The socio-economic discussion will include integral agrarian policy and the exploitation and conservation of natural resources. Colombians hope that discussion of the economic model will bring the true causes of the conflict onto the negotiation table. The Human Development Report on Colombia for 1999, prepared by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), details how far the country has fallen behind in terms of quality of life, education, literacy and income per capita, figures which put Colombia among the bottom countries on the American continent. Pastrana's own Development Plan recognises that 55% of households are below the poverty line and that 8.3 million Colombians live in poverty, meaning that at least 75% of the inhabitants of this country live in abject poverty, a situation set to deteriorate with IMF-agreed structural adjustment still to be implemented

Public Audiences

As a controlled way of engaging a wider range of social and political actors in the process, a series of hearings on the issue of employment have been held. More than 200 people have participated from all over the country. A further 300 proposals been received by post or Internet.

Cease-fire – hopes or dreams?

Hopes for a cease-fire have been raised despite the FARC's position of not calling a cease-fire until 80% of the agenda has been negotiated. Since 27 April, the government and the FARC have been presenting their proposals for a cease-fire to the negotiating table, and calls for proposals to be made to the table by those outside the formal process have been issued with a deadline of

July 3rd. Proposals include an initial three-month multi-lateral cease-fire covering all state security bodies, with a verification commission with members from the two sides. In all cases, a mechanism to make the paramilitary groups respect the cease fire would also have to be determined. According to the FARC, this is the responsibility of the government.

The Peace Process and the International Community

There is no doubt that the United Nations, the United States and the European Union are all now on the brink of serious political involvement in Colombia's peace process. UN Secretary General's Special Advisor on Colombia, Jan Egeland, is playing a significant role in engaging support for the process, and will make representations at both the London and Madrid meetings convened for Plan Colombia discussions. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia, along with the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, the Peace Initiatives Network and representatives of different sectors of civil society have demanded the immediate signing of a humanitarian agreement. The Government of Colombia and the FARC are seeking dialogue on the issue of illicit crops and possible crop substitution programmes, an issue of great importance to the United States and Europe. The US is predicating its support on reciprocal support from Government of Colombia for its eradication programme, something the FARC opposes. The European Union has historically held the view that alternative development is a preferred method of reducing production levels.

This involvement is the next stage of the international community's engagement with the process which began in earnest earlier this year. The then High Commissioner for Peace, Victor G Ricardo, and a commission from the FARC, undertook a tour of European states ostensibly to examine their political and economic models. An agenda was put together for the purpose of enriching the discussions at the negotiation table. The tour set off on 1 February and included various meetings in Sweden and Norway concerning economic management models, the structure of the state and political system, the role of the trade unions and employers, property, justice and social security among others issues. The tour was extended to include meetings in Rome with delegates from the Italian government and Monsignor Giorgio Lingua, a Vatican Foreign Office official and expert on Colombia. With this gesture Pope John Paul showed his support for the peace process. All who participated agreed it had been a significant contribution to essential trust-building between the parties

The Bolivarian Movement – a repeat of the Union Patriótica?

Quite apart from the negotiating process itself, the FARC has been busy with the launch of a new clandestine political movement and the start of a process in which it appears to be constituting itself as an alternative state.

The FARC announced the public launch of their political wing, the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia, on Saturday 29 April. The intention is that this should be a clandestine movement, in an attempt to avoid the kind of repression and assassinations that the UP (Patriotic Union) met with. More than three thousand members of this last group were murdered. The guerrilla group has stated that it will not participate in local elections in October. They will support popular candidates instead. The launch of this movement shows the political interest of the FARC not only with regard to the peace process but also with regard the current political crisis that the country is experiencing.

FARC and Plan Colombia

Many commentators believe that the upsurge in kidnapping and distortion in departments such as Cundinamarca is directly related to the FARC's need to strengthen its hand faced with increased US involvement in the military arena. This can be seen in the FARC's Law 002, aimed at exacting a 10% 'voluntary' tax contribution from everyone with assets equal to or above US$1m and in an order from Jorge Briceño, alias Mono Jojoy, to all fronts to up their membership, with the aim of reaching 32,000 men-at-arms, from the 16,000 at present. In addition, Manuel Marulanda,

Commander-in-chief of the FARC, has announced that the FARC will create their own justice system.

Such pronouncements have seriously undermined support for the government's peace efforts. In response the Government of Colombia has announced a new peace team: Camilo Gómez Alzate, a lawyer, is the new High Commissioner for Peace, (replacing Victor G. Ricardo) and Luis Guillermo Giraldo, Alfonso López Caballero and Monsignor Alberto Giraldo join the negotiation team.

Peace and the ELN

On 24 April an agreement was announced that made way for a 'zone for meeting and coexistence' as a place to hold the 'National Convention', the preferred mechanism of the ELN. The 'meeting zone' will initially last for nine months, and covers the municipalities of San Pablo and Cantagallo (Bolívar) and Yondó (Antioquia) comprising an area of 4749 km^2. It is 10% of the area of the demilitarised zone created for the peace talks with the FARC-EP. Due to criticisms of alleged excesses on the part of the FARC in their military-free zone, the new 'meeting zone' will have continuous national and international monitoring and the judicial authorities will remain in place. Emphasis will be placed on providing mechanisms to protect the fundamental rights of the population and to ensure that the area will not be used to strengthen the military capacity of the ELN.

The danger now appears to lie in the paramilitary threat. Paramilitary presence in the area is considerable and while Carlos Castaño has told the Human Rights Ombudsman that he is ready to withdraw his troops from the designated area if the ELN promises to implement a cease-fire, there has been strong local opposition. Roadblocks have been set up along several roads in the Magdalena Valley by peasant farmers protesting because they do not want to become victims of guerrilla atrocities. Even though the paramilitaries have claimed not to be behind these demonstrations, serious doubts remain as to the spontaneity of these inhabitants' protests. There also seems to have been a lack of communication on the part of the government to explain exactly the content and process of the ELN dialogue.

Visits by several members of the facilitating committee to try to convince the local population that negotiations leading to a peaceful solution with the ELN would be beneficial to the country have been unsuccessful, despite guarantees for fundamental rights, and the proposed national and international verification committees.

The ELN have stated that they would cease their actions on the Bogotá-Medellín road, allow the return of displaced persons as well as the repair of destroyed electricity pylons as gestures of peace. They also announced that they would accept the participation of serving military officials in the verification committees.

Talks are continuing to try to set a start date.

4. Human Rights – the same old story

During the period of this Update the 56th UN Commission on Human Rights received the third of the High Commissioner's reports from her office in Bogotá, which largely repeated the same recommendations and raised the same concerns as in the past. The Chair of the Commission read out a statement on Colombia that did not differ substantially from previous years. In overall terms there continues to be deterioration in the human rights and humanitarian crisis, and a continuing lack of real progress in the fight against impunity, or the paramilitary apparatus. Just prior to the Commission, Human Rights Watch produced a highly controversial report, The Ties that Bind, that highlights in detail the links between three of the Colombian Army's brigades and paramilitary groups. (See executive summary attached). It states without ambiguity that there is "detailed, abundant and convincing evidence of the habitual close links between the Colombian Army and the paramilitary groups responsible for serious human rights violations". It specifies that the III, IV and XIII Brigades have directly participated in massacres of civilians in their counter-insurgency fight. HRW also gives

concrete examples of this involvement, by stipulating, for example, that the so-called paramilitary group 'Frente Calima' (the 'Calima Front'), responsible for massacres in the department of Valle, is actually a group belonging to the army itself. While this report had significant impact in many circles, it has not deflected the US administration from its determination to support the Colombian military with counter-narcotics aid. This is despite very real doubts about the Colombian Army's human rights record, which the US state Department's annual report on the human rights situation in Colombia itself recognises.

5. Internal Displacement And A Growing Refugee Flow

According to the Consultoría para los derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (CODHES) 288,127 people were displaced by violence in 1999. The problem has also spread to neighbouring countries: around 11,700 Colombians have fled to Panama, Venezuela and Ecuador in search of refuge. Internally displaced persons continue to be one of the most worrying indications of the conflict. Close to 89% of the displaced persons fled for reasons directly or indirectly linked to the war.

While those who have the resources seek a route out of the country, those dependent on the State for support continue to be inadequately served by a failing state and lack of political will. The shift in responsibilities to the Red de Solidaridad Social (Social Security Network - RSS) has seen an erratic and wholly inadequate response. This appears to have encouraged a series of occupations of public offices by displaced persons, culminating in a prolonged and ongoing occupation of the offices of the ICRC. Initially the ICRC suspended its operations in 16 locations in Colombia, seriously affecting its humanitarian work with respect to visits to political prisoners, mediation with guerrilla groups to communicate with kidnapped persons and other matters related to its duties. A solution to the occupation still has not been achieved.

For the rest of the displaced population in other parts of Colombia the situation continues to be unstable. Efforts by the Catholic Church to accompany return processes in the department of Chocó, continue to meet with numerous obstacles, among them constant harassment by the armed actors, combat between armed groups, and direct attacks by paramilitary groups. Thanks to the constant accompaniment by diplomatic delegations and the stubbornness of organisations for the displaced, the national and international NGOs and the Church have managed to maintain a presence offering humanitarian aid in the whole of the Urabá region. Other areas continue to be under-served.

The exodus grows

The well-known television presenter with the longest track record in the industry, Pacheco, is the latest in a long list of well-known Colombians seeking refuge abroad. He follows hard on the heels of Francisco 'Pacho' Santos, editor of El Tiempo, and director of the Fundación Pais Libre (Free Country Foundation). Many other journalists, intellectuals, human rights defenders and other Colombians, alone or with their families have also left in the last few years, the majority of them without the fame or recognition afforded by the media. This exodus of the population has now taken on alarming proportions. An article in the New York Times on 5 March calculated that 800,000 Colombians have emigrated in the last four years (.e. 2% of a population of 40 million). This coincides with the Colombian Government figures of 600 people leaving the country every day by land or by air.

Plagued by the economic recession, unemployment, especially among professionals, the insecurity, threats and abuses committed as part of the armed conflict, and the increase in kidnappings (2663 people were kidnapped in 1999, a world record), streams of people from the middle and upper classes are hurriedly looking for other countries of residence.

As a result, visa applications have dramatically increased for many destinations, in particular Costa Rica, the United States, Canada, Australia and Western European countries. The number of

visa applications per year at the United States Embassy, for example, has leapt from 150,514 to 336,423 between 1997 and 1999; an increase of almost 150% in only two years. The earliest appointments for visa applications are for May 2001.

A serious implication of the exodus is that many of those who are leaving are professionals, in whose training the country has invested enormous resources; and social leaders, whose obligatory departure will further erode the social capital of the country. This has led Gonzalo Sanchez, a researcher at the National University, to warn of the risks for Colombia in a 'cultural brain drain' of unprecedented proportions.

Colombia: A threat to its neighbours?

Colombia shares land borders with five other Latin American countries, and is accessible by way of two oceans. This seems to give the Colombian conflict regional importance. Two central issues are possible spill over of the conflict and refugee flows.

In the last five years populations fleeing the violence have mainly ended up in Ecuador and Panama, less so in Venezuela, and at a very much lower rate in Brazil and Peru.

Ecuador has a clear policy on refugees and accepts asylum seekers. However, this country has been traditionally used by arms traffickers on their route for importing arms illegally to Colombia for the guerrillas or the paramilitaries. According to the recently opened UNHCR office in Quito, cases of Colombian asylum seekers are currently most numerous in Ecuador. The church and social and non-governmental organisations, carrying out humanitarian work with the displaced people, are also concerned about the negative impact that the renewed anti-drugs war as part of the Plan Colombia could have in the department of Putumayo.

The FARC's attack on the coastal village of Juradó (Chocó) in December 1999 produced a new exodus of the population, obliging them to flee to **Panama**. Almost 600 people, the majority of them from black or mixed race communities, arrived by motor boat, the remaining 130 people from Embera and Waunaan indigenous communities made a gruelling six day journey across the Darien jungles. These refugees have now joined 500 others that fled from paramilitary attacks in the Gulf of Urabá Antioquia and Chocó.

The Panamanian government's policy has changed since 1997 when it forcibly returned (*refouled*) 230 asylum seekers in complicity with the Colombian authorities. Currently, thanks to a 1998 internal law displaced people have received provisional humanitarian protection, but there is nothing to guarantee that they will not be *refouled*. Panama, like Ecuador, has been a favourite place for arms and drugs traffickers, many of them Colombians, which tends to means refugees are viewed with suspicion.

With respect to **Venezuela**, after the apparently voluntary return of the asylum seekers eight months ago when paramilitaries occupied the jungles of Catatumbo, (Norte de Santander), the two governments have insisted on a policy of containment that has not favoured refugees. The situation in **Peru** has not been sufficiently documented. Apart from the constant movement of Amazonian indigenous populations that have relatives on both sides of the border, the only thing that can be reported is that President Fujimori has begun a campaign to transfer military units towards the Colombian border. With respect to **Brazil**, information is even scarcer. No data is available on displacement of the population.

6. Prison Crisis – the war in microcosm

At the end of April the brewing crisis in the Prison service saw a pitched battle in the La Modelo prison in Bogotá which left over 30 people dead. What appeared to be a confrontation between the paramilitaries who control one of the landings and the so-called common criminals highlighted yet again the scandalous conditions in Colombia's prisons. According to an ex-advisor to the prison service, Alberto Caicedo, La Modelo is at 200% capacity, and conditions for inmates (60% of Colombia's prison inmates are on remand, but not kept separately) are some of the most inhumane in the world. He maintains that in order to eat decently, sleep on a

mattress, have access to toilets, bathrooms, washing facilities, health services and visitors, an inmate must pay on average $3,000,000 Colombian pesos a month to those who control the landings. If they cannot, they must work for those in control, which means they often become paid killers. Caicedo suggest that it is often those who have been arrested for non-payment of child support who end up in this situation.

The tragedy in La Modelo also showed just how far Colombia's internal conflict is being played out inside the penal establishments. The battle in La Modelo served to split the prison more effectively into two halves, one controlled by the guerrilla, the other by the paramilitaries. Every inmate is now forced to align themselves with one side or the other, while the authorities seem to wash their hands of their constitutional and international obligations.